

THE
HAPPY MEDIUM
CHARLES MARRIOTT

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THE HAPPY MEDIUM
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AND OTHER STORIES

BY

CHARLES MARRIOTT

AUTHOR OF

"THE COLUMN" "MRS. ALEMERE'S EloPEMENT"
"THE WONDROUS WIFE" "THE KISS OF HELEN"

ETC. ETC.

LONDON
EVELEIGH NASH
FAWSIDE HOUSE

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TO
W. R. K. WATSON

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I

THE HAPPY MEDIUM

I

A HEAVY mist was rolling in from the sea when Darnell set out from Porthia to walk across country to Porthlew, on the other coast, where he proposed to spend the remaining fortnight of his holiday. He had chosen his route in order to examine certain prehistoric survivals, the *Mén Scryfa* or "Written Stone" and the *Mén an Tol* or "Stone with a Hole" which, together with cromlechs, monoliths, stone circles and hut dwellings, punctuate the moors of West Cornwall and translate their mysterious atmosphere into more concrete symbols. Almost at the outset of his walk Darnell found white heather, and armed with this emblem of good-luck, his map and the directions which had been given him in Porthia, he never doubted that he should find the objects that appealed so strongly to his imagination.

He was soon to learn how useless were maps and directions when the elements joined forces and the reticence of the moor was aided by the subtlety of the mist, Protean in its forms, lifting and shutting down, lying wreathed in the valleys, rolling across the carns. Within an hour he had hopelessly lost his way. From off the sea came the faint moaning of steamers feeling their way through the fog, and at intervals the warning boom of the gun on the reef where a lighthouse guards the meeting of two channels. He remembered sailors talk of the fatality with which vessels draw together in a fog, and it seemed to him that a fatality directed his own movements. Late afternoon found him wandering down a green lane, apparently without beginning or ending, when suddenly he saw the blunted spear of the Written Stone looming over the hedge. A rude stile and a path trodden in the scrubby heather led up to it. The stone, about seven feet high, stood upon level ground in a little circle of coarse yellow grass. The inscription running downwards in deeply chiselled Roman letters was now indecipherable but for the fragmentary words RIOL . . . FIL . . . CUN. . . . The very absence of the conventional elements of romance and mystery, the baldness of its setting on the

level moor, made the stone all the more impressive. After a few minutes spent in fruitless endeavour to spell out the writing, Darnell returned to and followed the lane until it opened upon a wide, grassy strath before a ruined farm surrounded by stout walls with hewn gateposts and other relics of importance. Through the mist a dark shape loomed out at a little distance. That surely, thought Darnell, must be the *Mén an Tol*. But, as he approached, the mass moved and became a black-and-white cow feeding, with another of paler colour beside it. Baffled, Darnell was returning, when he caught sight of a horseman riding down the lane. He shouted and ran, and the horseman, reining in, awaited him. The man was young and finely built, bareheaded, stern-featured, with a high round forehead and far-seeing blue eyes. He sat his bare-backed horse with dignity and firmness: he looked like an Indian warrior. He gave Darnell minute directions for finding the Holed Stone and was moving on when, prompted by an odd wish to seem friendly, Darnell said—

“What is the *Mén Scryfa*?”

“A headstone,” the man shortly replied.

“To whom?”

“To a general,” said the other with a defiant intonation, and looking straight before him.

“And the *Mén an Tol*?”

“A place of torture.”

He gave his answers with force and brevity, as if he relied upon explicit knowledge not shared by the world in general.

“Did you come across the moor?” he asked of Darnell.

A little flattered that so stern a man should seem interested in his affairs, Darnell began to recount his wanderings, when the other cut him short with—

“Have you seen two bullocks, one dark the other red?”

Unreasonably pleased to be of use, Darnell pointed out where he had seen the cattle, and they parted. Darnell found the *Mén an Tol*, a massive ring of granite set on edge and wide enough for a broad-shouldered man to crawl through the opening. Flanking the ring at four paces on either hand was a monolith about four feet high.

As Darnell returned along the lane his imagination dwelt upon the mystery of the stones. The horseman’s description of the *Mén Scryfa*, “a headstone to a general,” stimulated him, and he thought of a stern Roman commanding an outpost in these wilds, exiled from the light and colour of his native city, dreaming over his Horace among hostile

barbarians, dying away from his kin—falling, perhaps, on a dark night before the rude weapon of a skin-clad savage.

Darnell's quest being accomplished, and nothing remaining but a walk along the broad road to his destination, the weakness of his nature asserted itself, and he remembered that he had not eaten for many hours and that he was very tired. The presence of a farm decided him to try to get refreshment.

The house, built of weather-stained granite, with splayed window openings and a projecting string-course, was larger and of more dignified character than is usual in these parts, and excited Darnell's architectural interest. At either end of the house were noble chimneys finished off in the blunted-pyramidal shape so peculiarly in accord with the lines of the country. In front was a little enclosure, half garden, half courtyard, separated from the lane by a low, thick wall with a bevelled coping, shadowed by stunted sycamores. For a moment the importance of the place made Darnell hesitate, but suppressing his fears as foolish, he walked up the flagged pathway and knocked at the heavy, closed door. It was opened by a tall girl clad in a dark blue pinafore which, falling in straight folds from her shoulders to her feet, lent her a look of

peculiar dignity. Behind her the light from a window fell on a broad staircase. Before her steady eyes and self-possessed attitude Darnell lost assurance, and changed the direct form of his question to—

“Can you tell me if there is any place near here where I can get a cup of tea?”

The girl hesitated and coloured faintly. Then she turned away without speaking and entered a room on the left-hand side of the passage.

“Well,” she said, on returning, “if you don’t mind putting up with discomfort, I can give you a cup of tea.”

II

He followed her through the passage into the kitchen. From a casual glance, the house, though very clean, was bare and showed signs of the greatest poverty. Apparently, only two or three of the rooms were used.

The kitchen, ceiled by the joists and planking of the floor above, was, to judge by its furniture, also used as the living-room, and bore traces of some refinement. There was an American organ standing on the bare stone floor, and the prints upon the walls, though not remarkable, seemed to have been chosen with a better and more personal taste than is usual in such places. Darnell began to apologise for the trouble he

was causing, but the girl cut him short. While she spoke her eyes fell on the sprig of white heather forgotten in the lapel of his coat, and her expression altered suddenly. She looked startled, pleased, and yet embarrassed. For a moment she was silent, and then she began hurriedly to make conversation as she went about the kitchen preparing tea.

“You don’t mean to say that you have walked all the way from Porthia? I wonder you found your way at all! it’s an ugly road in the best of weather. And did you see the *Mén Scryfa* and the *Mén an Tol*—the ‘Crick-Stone’ as they call it? That is because people crawl through it to cure crick in the back.”

She spoke correctly, though her voice was prettily roughened by the local accent. Darnell was conscious that she was indulging him, deliberately talking down to the level of the casual tourist and repeating the banal gossip of the guide-book.

While she talked, he began to recognise how beautiful she was. Her broadly oval face, with its warm colouring, small mouth and soft brown eyes reminded him of a picture by Da Vinci: the likeness was intensified by the rather wide space between her upper lids and finely marked eyebrows, and the subtly sarcastic expression of her mouth.

"There's a ruined chapel and a Wishing Well in Trenear parish," she went on, "but I don't suppose you'll be able to find them. Lots of people—visitors—try, but have to give it up—" She caught sight of Darnell's humorously protesting face and ceased abruptly.

"Why do you tell me this?" he asked in a reproachful tone.

She laughed a little tremulously, and continued her task of setting the table, which she had arranged for four persons. Darnell noticed that from nervousness she had cut an enormous quantity of bread-and-butter.

"Do you think I am going to eat all that?" he asked.

"Well," she said, "you have walked a long way. And, besides, Tom will be here directly. Tom eats a great deal."

He asked the question with his eyes only, but she answered quickly—

"Tom Trevithick is my cousin. This is his farm. I keep house for my aunt because she is getting old. It was my aunt that told me to give you tea," she added slyly; "now it's ready."

"Aren't you going to have tea with me?" he asked.

"No," she said demurely; "I must wait for Tom."

As she poured out his second cup of tea he noticed the engagement ring on her finger, without surprise, though with slight disappointment.

"Have you always lived here?" he asked.

"No; I used to teach in the Infant School—I daresay you noticed it, a small building up the road."

"Then, did you get tired of teaching?"

"A farmer's wife," she said, turning away to set down the teapot on the slab, "ought to know something about farming."

A heavy step sounded outside, and the horseman of whom Darnell had asked his way entered the kitchen. He glanced quickly at Darnell seated at the table, and from him to the girl.

"This is my cousin Tom," she said to Darnell; adding, hastily, "Did you say that you had walked all the way from Porthia?"

"You are very welcome," said the young man courteously. He went into the scullery to wash his hands at the sink, and, returning, drew his chair up to the table. The girl, whom he addressed as Wilmet, before sitting down, poured out a cup of tea, and, placing it on a tray, carried it into the next room, where Darnell heard her talking to another woman.

"You will please to excuse my mother," said

Trevithick, "she is not very well to-day, and is lying down in the parlour."

He spoke in a depressed but not a complaining tone. His manner was that of a man expecting little from life, fronting fate bravely and watchfully.

Wilmot returned and sat at the table, leaning her chin on her hand and furtively studying the two men. Darnell thought that her manner towards Trevithick was impatient and a little scornful. She seemed to be subjecting him to silent criticism. Trevithick's treatment of her was respectful and tender, a trifle conciliatory, as if he were not sure of her mood, but not without the firmness one would use to a wayward person.

Darnell was keenly interested in the oddly-matched pair. Trevithick, obviously to be polite, asked him about his plans, and Darnell, with the impulse to cut a romantic figure, said that he had no plans.

"I'm a rudderless man," he said, laughing; "when I come to a place that I like I stop there till I'm tired of it."

He saw that Wilmot was interested, and that encouraged him to talk on. He told them about his experiences tramping about the Continent, and while he talked, almost against his will, an idea came into his head.

"I suppose," he said, "there isn't a place near here where I could put up for a day or two? The wildness and loneliness of this moor country calls to something within myself."

"Mrs. Paull, at Trevean, sometimes takes lodgers," said the girl.

Trevithick shook his head.

"They are shiftless people, and you would not be comfortable," he said. "I think we could let you have a room here."

Darnell glanced at the girl, who frowned inhospitably, though her colour changed, and she was breathing faster.

"It's a thing we've never done," she said sharply.

"That's no reason," said Trevithick, with a quiet smile.

"But I should have to get a room ready——"

"Oh, please don't let me put you to any trouble," said Darnell sarcastically. She looked at him coldly.

"Oh, it isn't that," she said; and turning to Trevithick, "I'll ask Aunt Louisa what she thinks."

She rose abruptly, and left the table.

"My cousin is not so inhospitable as she seems," said Trevithick, reddening, and in the tone of one unused to apologise, "but she

likes to have the suggesting of things herself."

Wilmot returned immediately. Her nostrils were dilated and her cheeks were flushed, though she did not look altogether displeased.

"My aunt says that we can board you for five shillings a day. That is what Mrs. Paull charges. If you stayed a week it would be thirty shillings," she said mockingly. Darnell looked into her eyes, which did not flinch before his.

"I'll teach her a lesson," he thought, but said aloud—

"Thank you; if it isn't putting you about, I should like to stop for a week."

"Then that is settled," said Trevithick in a tone of relief. "No, thank you," as Darnell offered him his cigarette case, "I don't smoke, but please make yourself at home."

Wilmot had left the kitchen. Through the window Darnell saw that the town-place was full of cattle, patiently waiting. Trevithick rose from the table.

"I must get to my milking now," he said; "there's a newspaper upon the settle, though I'm afraid it is last Saturday's."

As he passed out through the door Darnell heard Wilmot stop him. The beginning of the conversation was inaudible, but he heard

Trevithick say something about money. As if she forgot discretion in her anger, Wilmot's voice was raised protestingly.

"Money is your god, Tom. Thirty shillings? Good heavens! You'd sell anything for thirty shillings. Some day you'll sell more than you know for thirty shillings a week."

Trevithick did not answer, but passed out, and presently Darnell heard the purring of milk in the pail.

When Wilmot came into the kitchen her face betrayed nothing. Darnell put down his paper.

"I'm sorry to put you to inconvenience, Miss Trevithick," he said. "If you would rather I didn't stay—"

"This is not my house," she said. "It makes no difference to me. Beggars must do as they are told. Now," she continued more kindly, but without giving him time to reply, "if you will sit in that chair by the slab you can smoke and read your paper or do anything you like, and I will clear away the things and wash up."

She carried the tea-things into the scullery, and presently seemed to have recovered her temper, for Darnell heard her singing softly as she splashed the hot water about.

"Can't I help you?" he called through the open door.

"No, thank you," she replied cheerfully, "I can manage; I'm used to it. Besides, you'd be sure to break something, and we can't afford that."

He rose, and stood by the door watching her. He admired the line of her bent head and her round, young arms, white and firm. Her hands being wet, she brushed aside a lock of hair with a graceful movement of her wrist.

"You ought not to be doing that," he said in a low voice.

"Oh, how you startled me!" she said, flushing deeply. "But why shouldn't I be doing this?" she asked, rather defiantly, turning round with a cup in her hand. "Isn't it a woman's work? Is there anything to be ashamed of in taking care of a man's house?"

Taken aback, he tried to stammer some explanation of his meaning. She answered him coldly.

"Ah, I suppose you are used to fine ladies who do nothing but read novels and drive in the Park?"

"You entirely misunderstand me," he said hotly; "housework and the work of a farm are ideal occupations for a woman so long as they don't prevent her doing what she wants to do."

He thought he had touched her grievance, but she made haste to undeceive him.

"I don't want to do anything else—even if I could," she said; "and I should hate an idle life."

"Then why complain?"

"Was I complaining?" she said, looking at her finger-nails as she dried her hands on the roller towel. "Well, Mr. Darnell, can you manage to amuse yourself without me while I read to my aunt?"

There was a subtle malice in the word "amuse." In her absence, Darnell lit a cigarette and walked up and down the kitchen. The girl attracted him strangely, and he believed that her hostile manner was only a veil to some deep disturbance of her nature. At first he had supposed that her dissatisfaction was the common revolt of a half-educated girl from the drudgery of domestic work. But, apart from her words, the way she did her washing-up was evidence to the contrary, even to so undomesticated a man as Darnell. Had she quarrelled with her lover? Their hostile terms seemed too habitual for that. The only conclusion Darnell could come to was that her engagement to her cousin was under pressure, or for the sake of a home. Meanwhile, the musical rise and fall of her voice from the next room was in his ears.

He did not see her again until Trevithick re-entered the house. It was as if she had deliberately avoided being alone with him in the twilight. Almost immediately, the cousins, aided by a boy, set about some business in the dairy, which adjoined the scullery. Trevithick had asked whether he should light the kitchen lamp, but Darnell preferred to sit by the glow of the fire. He heard the clanking of pails, and the soft splashing of milk being poured from one vessel to another, and he thought of Wilmot, bare-armed, handling the heavy cans. Presently he was startled by a curious moaning sound rising chromatically ; something between a human cry and that of the wind through a keyhole. The sound was agitating, menacing. Darnell could stand it no longer ; he rose and walked softly into the scullery.

By the glow of a candle in the dairy beyond he saw Wilmot, Trevithick, and the boy busy about some piece of machinery. Trevithick turned a handle, the boy stooped to a pail, and Wilmot held aloft the candle which reddened and illuminated her face, and picked out the group from a cavernous space of shadows. Fascinated by the sight, Darnell leaned against the door-post and sombrely watched the girl. Though she did not lift her eyes he guessed by the demure curving of her cheek in a smile

that she was aware of him. She made no sign, and it was not until Trevithick, rising to wipe his forehead, turned sharply round that Darnell moved forward.

"Have you ever seen a separator at work, Mr. Darnell?" said Trevithick.

Darnell said that he had not, and moved into the circle of candle-light.

Trevithick became almost enthusiastic as he described the quickness and efficiency of this method of separating the cream from the milk, while Wilmot listened with a subtly ironical smile. The boy left the place on some errand, and when Trevithick turned to his task again, Darnell took the candle from Wilmot's hand. Whether by accident or in obedience to an ungovernable impulse he could not have said, his hand rested for a moment on her cool fingers. There was no response, though she did not draw them away; there was no sign to be read in her face, no change in her breathing, though Darnell's heart was beating violently.

After supper they sat round the slab in the kitchen. Mrs. Trevithick joined them. She was a small, anxious old woman, apparently suffering that collapse of mind and body which so often follows an active life in limited circumstances. She talked of her ailments and her son's poverty with a frankness embarrassing to

the stranger. Trevithick apologised for the absence of beer.

"I'm a total abstainer myself," he said, "but I don't set up to judge people who think differently."

Darnell assured him that he had no desire for beer, and turned the conversation to the stones. He was interested to learn how these relics of antiquity affected the imagination of the moor people. Trevithick, a sound Methodist, was, as Darnell had expected, chiefly concerned with the moral to be drawn from the difference between pagan and Christian ideals. Wilmot, who was now flushed and agitated, listened impatiently to him, and at last broke out—

"Yes, but what do we really know? It is like trying to put the sea into a tea-cup. If you ask the people here they tell you that the *Men an Tol* was meant for nothing more than to cure crick in the back. You say that it was a place of torture; that people were bound to the ring and burned. But what people, and why? And how is it that the idea of pain, of suffering, has come down to this day, although in a foolish saying, about crick in the back?"

Trevithick explained his own theory, evidently based on his religious convictions.

"The early Christians took over and purified

the heathen ceremonies. Just as Wesley did with the Roman Catholics. There's the old chapel in Trenear parish. If you were down here the first three Sundays in May month you'd see hundreds of people flocking to the preaching. That's because Wesley preached there. He wasn't for destroying the place because it had been used for idolatry and the Mass ; he taught the people to take and give a better meaning to whatever was good in the old religion."

"Yes," said Wilmot, with a malicious light in her eyes, "and after the preaching the people go and try their luck at the Wishing Well. You take a pin," she said, turning to Darnell, and speaking with a reflective smile, "and tie a bit of rush to it so as to make a cross. Then you twirl the pin and fling it into the water. If it sinks to the bottom you'll get your wish, but if it floats your wish will never come true."

"That's all foolishness," said Trevithick, moving uncomfortably.

"I'm not saying that it isn't," said Wilmot, with heightened colour, "but why do the people go there after the preaching? Doesn't it show that their instincts are stronger than all the preaching, that something in their blood remembers the old days? Ah, life was worth living then ; when people fought and loved and

hated fiercely. Sometimes, when I lie awake listening to the wind howling across the moor, I fancy that I can hear the old people mourning that the joy is gone out of life."

"I'd be ashamed," said Trevithick gravely. "That's no way for a modest maid to talk. You ought to be thankful that those evil times are dead."

"Well, if you're quite sure they're dead," said Wilmot, rising, "that's all right."

When she lit Darnell to his room she talked quickly in a matter-of-fact tone.

"Of course, if you like, you can have your meals in the parlour."

He cut her short impatiently.

"You don't treat me fairly, Miss Trevithick."

He held out his hand, but she appeared not to notice it.

"Well," he said in a low voice, "did the pin sink or swim?"

She smiled mysteriously, looking down and picking at the melted wax which ran down the side of the candle guttering on the draughty landing.

"It is a long time since May," she said. "Good-night."

"Oh, good-night," he muttered, turning away.

At the head of the broad staircase she waited for a moment.

“Yesterday,” she said, “I, too, found white heather on the moor.”

III

In spite of his fatigue Darnell did not sleep well that night. There was a mystery about the girl which provoked him. Now that he had seen her he reviewed the events of yesterday in a new light; and details which had otherwise been meaningless, the accidents of a walk on the moor, became part of a fatality which had guided his footsteps to the farm. Wilmot’s last words, “Yesterday I, too, found white heather on the moor,” seemed like an admission that she also recognised the hand of Destiny.

When at last towards daybreak Darnell fell asleep he dreamt that he was crawling through the *Mén an Tol*, and that he stuck fast. He heard the deep, stern voice of Trevithick, who lit a fire of gorse about him, and stood, a terrible figure in Roman helmet, leaning on a spear. As he slowly burned, Wilmot, with scorched and bleeding hands, raked in the ashes for his heart. Bodiless, in his agony he tried to kiss her wounded hands, while she moaned aloud, “Oh, he has no heart!”

He awoke with a bitter cry as if her hands were about him.

But when they met at breakfast she was cool and calm, with a smiling face and neatly braided hair. He was persuaded that she had only been mocking him after all. She asked him questions about his plans for the day: would he be in to dinner and what would he like to eat? Towards Trevithick she seemed in rather a penitent mood, and as if she would repay him for some neglect she spoke to him interestedly about the affairs of the farm. Trevithick was grave and quiet, but seemed even more thoughtful than usual. Once Darnell caught his steady blue eyes fixed upon him. The old woman, who seemed to have recovered from her indisposition, questioned him, he thought, suspiciously. She harked back to remarks he had made about his life and profession in London as if she had thought them over and found discrepancies. Darnell began to grow ill-humoured and cursed himself for a sentimental fool. As if to hint that his company was not desired during the day, Wilmot began to tell him about interesting places near at hand. With the feeling that he was being managed and powerless to resist, Darnell sulkily assured her that he should not be in till supper time. Nothing disturbed, her parting words to him were—

"You might try your luck at the Well."

The wind had slipped round to the east, the mist had cleared away, and the air was crisp and fine. Under a steely-blue September sky, barred with faint clouds full of light, the moor looked bare and brown. From a rise of the ground Darnell looked back at the stones; from this distance, and robbed of the mist, they were trivial and uninteresting.

"The mist got into my head," he said to himself, "the mist got into my head."

Reaching the cliff, he climbed down into a little cove where a strip of yellow sand ran up between grey boulders, and bathed in the sea. With new vigour in his limbs, he felt proof against dreams, and inclined to be philosophical. He already regretted that he had committed himself to stopping a week with the Trevithicks, but he would make the best of it. The farm would do very well as a centre; he would spend his days exploring the country, and it would be not unpleasant to sup in the warm-lit kitchen and to spend long drowsy evenings in the company of a very charming girl. If she wanted to amuse herself, well, two could play at that game. And if Trevithick turned sulky, so much the better; it would be interesting to watch the struggle in his mind between jealousy and greed. Darnell thought that he would

have a mildly sentimental memory to carry back to town with him. There would be no harm done. He might, perhaps, and the idea thrilled him more than he cared to admit, steal a kiss from Wilmot at parting.

As he climbed the hill again, his mind was lifted out of the narrow groove in which it had moved during the last few hours. For a little while he forgot the girl, and his thoughts went wandering in wide circles. He looked down upon a broad belt of pasture land running round the coast between the moor-capped hills and the sea. Up the sides of the valleys the fields were like little plates of green enamel inlaid on the moor. Lines of hedges ran down from the edge of the moor, like skirmishers converging upon the grey "villages"—mere groups of farm buildings without individual character, huddled together as if for protection—here and there conspiring into little furzy crofts, so that the whole scene suggested an unending struggle between man and the moor. Whether from the reaction from his bathe, Darnell grew depressed, and to his mind the moor seemed to be steadily gaining. The farms were being slowly strangled, and a Methodist Chapel, its round-headed windows catching the light, stared at the advancing moor with round eyes of helpless terror.

Southward, the country softened, and wooded valleys ran down to a milder sea. To shake off his depression Darnell walked that way, and spent the afternoon in the little town which, but for a pair of mysterious brown eyes, had been his headquarters during the rest of his holiday.

When towards evening he made his way back to the farm the spell of the girl began to come over him again. He knew, now, that so far from any desire for amusement he was fighting against her influence. He thought of his dream, and of her wounded hands searching for his heart in the ashes of his body, and of her voice crying, "Oh, he has no heart!" Torn between mingled feelings, and not sure of himself, he hoped that he should not find her alone. When he entered the kitchen in the dusk he heard her with her cousin and the boy busy in the dairy. Resisting the temptation to go and look at her, he made no sound, but sat down with bent head before the fire.

Presently she came into the kitchen with barely concealed eagerness, and he knew that she alone of the three had heard him come in, and that she had hastened to greet him. She was flushed from her labour and breathing quickly. In her eyes and on her lips was a smile of welcome no longer mocking. As he

looked gravely into her eyes he knew that she had suffered from his absence.

"Oh, here you are, Mr. Darnell," she greeted him cheerfully, but her voice was uncertain. From that moment he knew that there was no peace for him. He rose from his chair with outstretched hands, and eyes mutely pleading. She shook her head and hurried from the room.

That evening for all of them was a severe trial. Darnell, pale and disturbed, dared not look at Wilmot, who sat listlessly by the fire pretending to sew. Trevithick was moody and silent, while the old woman, watchful and suspicious, harassed their nerves with her complaining.

"I'm better dead. I'm afraid I have lived too long in this place of stones and furze where there is nothing but enemies. When I am passed, Tom, you must sell up the farm and go to live in the south. You'll never do any good in this place; it is a stony land with no heart in it."

Wilmot did not light Darnell to his room that evening. When he said "Good-night" to her in the kitchen she would not give him her hand, and he could not see what was in her eyes.

IV

Darnell awoke with the firm conclusion that he could stay no longer at the farm. During the night he had passed through a succession of moods. At one time he had almost made up his mind to accept the gift of Destiny and to ask this dreaming daughter of the moors to share his life. So far had he rid himself of the idea of flirtation that he felt it an injustice to her to suppose that she might refuse him. Being sincere, no woman could have worn that look of yesterday on her face unless she cared for him. Trevithick he did not now consider of much importance. A grasping, practical man, caring for the girl in his own cold fashion, but chiefly bent on obtaining a wife necessary to the farm. Wilmot would make him a good wife no doubt, but at the sacrifice of an indefinable something, the finer part of herself which found no response in his nature. Of Wilmot's affection for Trevithick, Darnell could not feel certain. But, thinking about her, a fear of the unknown again seized upon him : he would never feel sure of her.

When they met in the morning Wilmot seemed to have steeled herself to bear the situation. She was pale but composed ; mov-

ing about the kitchen with a sober dignity. Evidently she, too, had slept badly. Trevithick had already breakfasted and gone out, but the presence of his mother at the table saved them from embarrassment. Mrs. Trevithick was now thinking less about her ailments, but had fallen into a ludicrous terror of trivial debts, so that Wilmot and Darnell found a common and safe topic of conversation in trying to reassure her.

Immediately after breakfast Darnell left the house to spend the day wandering aimlessly about the hills, which now had for him a deep emotional significance. He had made up his mind to go; to leave Cornwall altogether and to spend the rest of his holiday in another place—where did not seem to matter. Though he did not intend to see Wilmot again, some weakness in his nature had prevented him from taking definite leave of the place where she dwelt. He had left his knapsack at the farm, and he had not paid his bill. He intended either to leave the thirty shillings for his week's lodging in his room, with a short note explaining that he had changed his plans, or to give it to the old woman.

He returned to the farm at a time when he supposed that Trevithick would be away from the house. Wilmot was in the kitchen when

he entered. She gave him a hunted look and whitened as she leaned one hand on the table. Nerving himself, Darnell was yet afraid to speak the truth.

"I have been down to the post-office in Trenear," he said, speaking hurriedly and without looking at her; "there was a letter—I find that it is necessary for me to go back to London at once."

"Yes," she said faintly. He knew that she did not believe his explanation.

"Will you explain matters to your cousin? I—the arrangement was——" but his imagination, ahead of his words, pictured him putting money into her hand, and his voice drained away.

Her eyes slowly flooded, and she moved hesitatingly as if to leave the kitchen. But before she reached the door Darnell was at her side with a low cry of—

"Wilmot, Wilmot!"

She bent her shoulders away from him with her eyes tightly closed, like a child avoiding a blow. The ungraceful gesture, so unexpected, so pitifully sincere, in her who was the embodiment of grace lifted him to heights he had never dreamed. The very intensity of his passion, sweeping away all purposes, kept him from touching her. He waited while she leaned her

head on her arm against the door-post, breathing heavily.

As if asking himself the question, he said at last—

“What does it all mean, Wilmot?”

She turned round to him, and still leaning her shoulder against the wall, she spoke with the desperate sincerity of one talking about facts too glaring to be denied or evaded.

“I have been expecting—I have waited for you for so long that now I don’t know. I’m afraid. Oh, you will be very truthful with me, won’t you? It is all so wonderful and terrible. I can’t believe that you are deceiving me, and yet——”

“Don’t think about me. I’m nothing; I don’t count—except that I love you.”

“I feel as if I have been playing with dreadful powers and have set something going that I can’t control,” she said brokenly. “Have I been wicked? When I said I would marry Tom I ought to have given it all up, but somehow he wasn’t everything, and so I kept on—expecting. He doesn’t know—you heard him—nobody knows; but I knew there was a meaning, that there was something, somebody.”

And this, he remembered with shame, was the girl he had thought laughingly to kiss at parting.

“Wilmot, you love me?” he murmured.

"Oh, don't ask me now," she pleaded. "I really don't know; I'm not ready. Don't you understand that if you are—yourself, I've nothing to give, I'm given? If I love you, I have always loved you. There's nothing to say—it is all said. Can't you be patient? How can I speak, here, in his house? I thought that I cared for him as he cares for me, but— Oh, I don't know."

"He doesn't care, he can't care," he said passionately. "He only—" the sense that he was about to say something dishonourable checked the words on his lips. But she shook her head, and with less agitation spoke gravely and quietly.

"That's what I can't be sure about. Sometimes I think one thing, sometimes another. Sometimes I think that he cares only about money and the things that money can buy, that he only wants me to be his wife, and then, don't you see how difficult it is for me? What am I to do?"

"Follow your heart, don't think about it—it isn't a matter for thought. If you think, you are sure to go wrong. We were led to one another. Don't go against Fate."

"Yes, I know, I know," she said eagerly. "If it is so—I believe that if I don't take— Oh, what am I saying? Please go away now."

"You must give me your answer, Wilmot, I can't bear another day. And it isn't fair to Tom."

"Tom?" she said. "Oh, but if I were sure, I should not wait a minute; I should tell him at once."

She hesitated, thinking deeply, with white face and anxious eyes.

"Listen," she said, "I don't like to do it, it seems so deceitful, but it is the only way. To-night is choir practice at the chapel. Generally we—Tom and I—go together. But I can easily make an excuse. Go away now, and meet me at the Crick-Stone at eight o'clock. Will that do?"

He eagerly consented, but, overmastered by longing, made a movement towards her. She put him away.

"Oh, you don't understand me," she said, surprised and a little grieved. "If I were sure, now, would there be any need for you to ask?"

V

Darnell made his way along the dark lane in a state of feverish excitement. All plans were put aside; all speculation about the future was impertinent. The only thing that mattered was Wilmot's answer. Before he reached the

step in the hedge he saw that Wilmot was standing there already, hooded with a shawl. He suffered a momentary misgiving; her anticipation of their meeting seemed to imply that all had not gone well.

"I'm glad you've come," she murmured, with a little foolish laugh. "I could not go farther alone—at the last moment I was afraid. I don't know why; I have never been afraid of the moor before. We'll go together."

Her confidence in him touched him deeply. As if she would not risk the touch of his hand, she stepped lightly over the hedge before he could help her.

"I know the path better than you," she said, "walk behind me."

From here the stone was invisible against a background of ragged furze-bushes. The night was cloudy and still; the brooding shapes of the hills were felt rather than seen. From afar came the noise of the sea. Away to the right were the lights of Trenear village; one isolated and bigger than the rest marked the chapel where Trevithick was singing. Darnell avoided it with his eyes.

As if this interval coming before the arranged meeting were not to be reckoned as time, Wilmot was calm and self-possessed, now and then uttering a word of warning to Darnell

where the path was difficult. His agitation increased as they drew nearer to the place ; it was only with a strong effort that he avoided precipitating the question that he had come to ask. When at last he caught sight of the Holed Stone, he had the odd feeling that the shape of it was changed. Before he had time to think what this meant, the outline moved before his eyes and a man, who had been leaning on the stone, stood upright. Wilmot gave a little cry, ran back and clung to Darnell's arm. Neither had any need to hear Trevithick's voice to know that it was he.

"Don't be afraid," he said ; "come nearer. I must speak to you two."

They could not make out his features. He spoke in the flat, emotionless voice of a man exhausted by passion. Not assured, and believing him to be dangerous, Darnell felt his heart leap exultantly, and he moved in front of Wilmot. Trevithick noticed the action and laughed shortly. Wilmot at least understood him, and said in a low voice—

"He speaks the truth."

Silently they moved nearer to the stone. Trevithick, with folded arms, leaned once more upon it. Darnell and the girl stood before him side by side, with their arms hanging straight at their sides. He might have been a priest

and they two penitents come for absolution. In the obscurity Darnell made out Trevithick's gun lying on the pale grass at his feet, and he remembered his dream. As if he had followed the movement of his eyes, Trevithick said—

“If you had come an hour ago I should have killed you both, but all that is past. I have been through my black hour; I have learned my lesson. You have nothing to fear from me now. I told you, sir, that this is called the Place of Torture, but I thought only of the fire that burns the body. You knew better, Wilmot; there is another meaning. I thought that God permitted a man and a woman to choose one another, but I understand now that it is not in their power.” He laughed softly. “I have not forgotten your words, Wilmot. Thirty shillings; thirty pieces of silver. Have I sold love for thirty pieces of silver?”

“Oh, Tom, Tom! what are you saying?” she murmured brokenly.

“Only that you have not understood me. I am not a scholar; I can't make pretty speeches. I don't know what love means to you, but love to me means duty and service. I thank God, Wilmot, that you cannot lie or deceive. When I came in this afternoon I knew that you had planned to cheat me. And when you said that you would not come to chapel I knew that you

meant to meet this man somewhere. Why I should have known that you were coming here I don't know—unless God guided me. But I'm not going to whine ; I've learnt another lesson from these stones. That stone yonder—" he pointed with a movement so impressive that they involuntarily turned their heads, though from where they stood the *Mên Scryfa* was invisible. "The man that lies under that stone was a heathen and worshipped idols, but I think he knew the meaning of duty and service. From what we know he served in a bad cause, the cause of tyranny and oppression, but I reckon he served his masters faithfully. When he was knocked on the head in a just quarrell, I reckon he did not cry out or complain. And now he lies there with just his name and his father's name as a lesson to us. But that is enough of my troubles. What have you to say, sir?"

"That I love her."

"Love!" Trevithick repeated the word bitterly. "How am I to know what you mean by love? We don't believe in the same God ; we don't speak the same language. Your love may be the foulest thing on earth. But it is not for me to judge you ; I'll take your word. And you, Wilmot, do you love this man?"

She did not speak.

"Your actions are readier than your tongue," said Trevithick drily, "but you are not a wanton, so I'll take your silence. Well then, you two, go away quickly while I am yet master of myself. No, stay," as Darnell made as if to take Wilmot's arm; "the maid has no guardian but me, and I can't let her leave my roof with no surer protection than your love."

Darnell moved impulsively, but Trevithick raised his hand with a gesture so dignified that he forebore.

"This is no matter for quarrelling, sir," he said gravely. "I don't insult you; I judge from within myself; and knowing what a terrible power love is when it takes hold of a man, I must have something more of you. I don't know whether you fear God, but Wilmot has well said that there's a deeper meaning here than we understand. Let the stone be your witness that you mean honestly. Take the maid's hand through the stone and swear that you are ready now for love to make her your wife and honour her always. Come, Wilmot."

She moved unsteadily, and they joined hands through the stone. Darnell began to repeat the words. He was not conscious

of any reluctance. What failed him he did not know; what uncertainty of voice or touch, but Wilmot tore her hand away with a cry.

“You are not telling the truth! No, no—I don’t trust you. Tom—take me away from him!”

Trevithick’s only answer was a grating laugh.

“Wilmot!” began Darnell agitatedly, and moved forward. But the girl, evading him, flung herself on the ground at Trevithick’s feet and clasped his knees.

“Tom, forgive me!” she cried, “I’ve been a wicked girl. I’ve played with forbidden things. Oh, come away from this dreadful place. I’ve been out of my mind, ill-wished. I did not know till now that I loved you. I thought you hard and selfish, that you loved nothing but money, that you only wanted me to keep your house. I feel as if I had come out of a dream. Tom—won’t you believe that I love you and you only?”

She broke into a low sobbing. Trevithick stood with bowed head, his hands resting on her arms. When at last he raised his head, Darnell understood and silently moved away.

II

SYMPATHY

I

THE man and woman planting potatoes in the little irregularly shaped field on the side of the valley worked as if they were conscious of the hostility of the land, and would set some indelibly human character upon it before nightfall. Beginning at the bottom of the field, the man rapidly opened a shallow drill in the light soil with a long-handled shovel having a heart-shaped blade. Resting the shaft on his knee, he deftly flung the soil into the last drill which had already been planted. He was strongly but not stoutly built, of average height, with crisp, curling hair of lightish brown. His clean-cut face, though deeply bronzed, was oddly at variance with his occupation; he looked more like an actor than a farmer.

The woman, following close at his heels, was dressed in a dark red blouse and a black skirt,

showing ankles so round and slim that they looked ridiculous in the man's boots she wore. On her left arm she carried a basket of "shooed" potatoes which she carefully planted in the drill the man had just opened.

When he reached the top of the field the man gave a "Ha!" of relief and, driving the blade of his shovel into the soil, turned about. The woman finished her task hurriedly; indeed the last potato almost fell from her fingers. In the act of straightening her back she reached out her hand and touched the man's. The movement, together with her murmured endearment, expressed a so passionate devotion that one would have expected to find her in some way marred and therefore grateful for the mere privilege of loving. But the face she turned to follow the man's moody stare across the valley was quite beautiful and full of character. She had black hair and eyes of greenish hazel.

The man looked at her with a slight frown, and said—

"It makes me ashamed to see you working in the fields. None of the other farmers' wives do it."

"Never mind the others, Ned," she said, "we've only ourselves to please. Besides, we've nearly finished now."

He shrugged his shoulders.

“And then?”

“It’s something done, anyhow.”

“Which may be a dead loss.”

“Never!” she said passionately. “We shall have got the worth of it by having done it together.”

“It’s not what I was meant for,” said the man in a grumbling tone; “nor you either,” he added as an afterthought. “I believe if I went to London I could make as much in a month as we get out of this cursed hole in a year.”

“We’re better off this year than we were last.”

“A trifle,” he admitted, “but only because we’ve cut down expenses. A few more years will see us small farmers wiped out,” he continued, “and then we shall have to turn to something else. My argument is that I should try now while I have health and strength and a pound or two in the bank. . . . Well, I suppose we’d better get the job finished.”

They resumed their work, and hardly spoke again until they had planted and covered in the last drill. Once more they stood side by side at the top of the field.

Immediately opposite them, on the other side of the valley, there was a large granite house standing in a gravelled space above the

road which ran down to the Cove. As they watched, the door opened and a woman in cap and apron came out and looked along the road. From away to the right, among the ash trees which filled the head of the valley, came the groaning of brakes applied to the wheels of some vehicle descending the hill.

"It'll be a lady, I expect," said Annie Rosteague, "because a gentleman would walk or cycle out from Porthleu."

"How you women do talk!" said her husband, finding relief from his own curiosity in reproving hers.

The groaning of brakes suddenly ceased with a quick rush of wheels, and in another moment there came in sight a white-curtained, four-wheeled vehicle of the kind known as Jersey cars. The curtains were drawn back so that the occupants of the car were visible. They were a lady, apparently young, and a little girl.

"I wonder who it is," said Annie. "Mrs. Oats did not tell me she had let her rooms."

"Well, we shall know before long, I suppose," said her husband rather irritably.

She hung on his arm, saying—

"Don't be cross with me, Ned; I haven't your thoughts, and it pleases me to guess about our neighbours. Besides, it's partly for your

sake ; there's very little company here, of your level, and I'm always hoping for somebody that you can talk to."

"It isn't likely that visitors are going out of their way to be friendly to a common farmer," he said bitterly.

"That's absurd, Ned. You are what you are, and with your talents anybody would be glad to know you. Mr. Waddington said so!"

He did not answer, though he evidently thought she spoke the truth. The car had now reached the door of the boarding-house in a little bustle of reception. Mrs. Oats, her husband, and a small maid all came out and busied themselves with boxes and bags.

"She'll have a lot of dresses," said Mrs. Rosteague. "A Londoner, I expect. Though, of course, children's things take up a lot of room. I wish it was a little boy, so that I could get hints how to dress Felix."

The lady was provokingly hidden by the car. From the way she had sprung to the ground she was young and graceful. Presently she stepped forward to the edge of the drive, against a low wall, and the Rosteagues had a good view of her. She was dressed in mauve, with a large hat, and she struck an exotic note in her austere surroundings. She looked a

mere girl. The child's head appeared over the top of the wall.

"I suppose that must be her child," said Mrs. Rosteague doubtfully.

"She doesn't look like a married woman," was her husband's opinion ; "more likely she's the child's aunt."

Mrs. Rosteague shook her head.

"If she is, then the little one is an orphan."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because they belong to go about together."

The driver put on the brakes again, and the car went slowly down the hill. The child pointed across the valley, and the lady bent to catch what she said. Then they went into the house, and the door closed behind them.

II

Shortly before seven o'clock Annie Rosteague jumped out of bed, and, after a glance at the baby asleep in his cot, went softly down the stairs which led directly into the kitchen. Taking furze and coal from a deep cupboard beside the "slab," she lit a fire, put on the kettle, and warmed some milk in a little enamelled saucepan. When she got upstairs again, the little boy, aged about fifteen months, was awake and sitting bolt upright staring at

the lightening window with the eternal wonder of childhood at a new day. At sight of his mother he broke into a sleepy grin. She gave him the milk, and he drank eagerly, holding the mug and her hand between his own. When he had finished he pushed her hand away. Bending over the cot she softly bit his little neck. The child responded with a bubbling chuckle and flung out his limbs. With wide-open eyes she held up her finger warningly, and he lay back fencing at her face with his feet and hands. Evidently the new day was a joke to be shared between them. She pinned a little shawl about his shoulders and gave him a skin-covered horse to play with. By the time she had finished dressing, and put on her long, pink pinafore, she could hear the kettle boiling. She went downstairs and returned with a cup of tea. Setting it down on the window-sill, she leant over the bed and shook her husband. He was long waking, muttering confusedly and rubbing his eyes.

“What a lazy beast I am,” he said in a tone of self-reproach.

“Here, drink your tea,” she said, cutting him short, “it’s not half-past seven yet.”

Rostegue dressed quickly, shivering and blinking; taking no joy of the morning. He

descended, carrying the boy. Annie looked round from stirring oatmeal and eyed him anxiously. He was not ill-tempered, but depressed looking. Just as all her actions and movements seemed part of a musical game, his were all protests.

"I'll have breakfast ready before you've finished milking, dear," she said, as he left the kitchen.

Seating the boy in a little rocking-chair, she gave him a piece of bread-and-butter and went on with her preparations for breakfast. Presently a red-faced, hard-breathing bundle of a girl came in. Shyness in the presence of her mistress made her approach the baby as if she had never seen him before. With astonished disapproval he held out his hands and repeated her name, "Selina." When Annie was not looking, she bent her shock head over the baby and kissed him.

While shaking the mat on the steps, Selina called out, "There's a lady and a little girl coming, missis."

Annie looked out of the window, and recognised the lady and child she had seen arriving at the boarding-house the day before. Her attention was held by the fairy-like beauty of the little girl, who was daintily dressed in a white coat and carried a milk-can in her hand.

"Oh, are you Mrs. Rosteague?" said the lady, rather superciliously, when Annie went to the door. The visitor was under the middle-height and slightly built. Her hair and eyes were brown, her complexion was rather sallow, but her features were small and well-shaped.

Annie said that was her name, and, smiling at the little girl, held out her hand for the can.

"My little girl is rather delicate," said the visitor, "and the doctor wishes me to be very careful about the milk she drinks. We are staying at the boarding-house, and Mrs. Oats recommended me to come to you."

"Thank you," said Annie. "Come inside, please."

The lady hesitated, but, at a movement of the little girl's, entered the kitchen.

"My name is Mrs. Abingdon," she said, with an awkward laugh, as if she were ashamed of her previous manner, "and this is Cherry."

"Oh, mummie!" cried Cherry, "what a beautiful baby." She ran forward and dropped on her knees before the boy, who patted her face with his two hands and smiled gravely.

"Won't you sit down?" said Annie. "My husband has not finished milking yet, but I'll send Selina with a jug."

Mrs. Abingdon sat down on a wooden chair and studied her hostess with the slightly hostile curiosity one pretty woman, who sets great value on her good looks, gives to another. Annie was quite at her ease; for the moment she seemed the better bred of the two. She asked her visitor how long she intended to stay in the neighbourhood.

"For the spring, anyhow," said Mrs. Abingdon. "Cherry is not very strong, and the sea air may do her good. My husband is in India," she continued. "The climate where he is is not suitable for us. He is a soldier."

Selina returned with the milk, which Annie strained through a little horsehair sieve into the can. Mrs. Abingdon rose with nervous alacrity.

"I think," she said, from the step, "that I shall send Cherry for her own milk every morning. The walk will be good for her. You'll like that, won't you, Cherry?"

Rossteague returned from his milking without being called. His hurried footsteps, immediately slackened when he saw that the visitors were gone, would have told something to a more maliciously observant person than his wife. She, however, was too excited to notice his disappointment.

"Oh, Ned," she cried, "I wish you'd come

in a little earlier. She's the dearest little thing I've ever seen, but as frail as a wood anemone. She's just like wax. She's to come for milk every morning."

"Who are you speaking of?" he said, taking his place at the end of the table.

"Didn't Selina tell you that Mrs. Abingdon, the lady that has taken rooms with Mrs. Oats, has been here with her little girl?"

"She said somebody wanted milk," he replied, beginning his breakfast, "but I was busy and did not take in who it was."

For some time, to his annoyance, Annie talked about the little girl, but presently she said—

"She's a little woman; I should say she would be about twenty-six, so she must have married young, because her little girl is at least five. Poor thing," she continued reflectively, "her husband is in India."

Edward laughed.

"How sentimental you are, Annie," he said; "I daresay they are happier."

"I think that is unkind," she said gravely; "she does not look the sort of woman who would wish to be away from her husband."

III

Mrs. Abingdon's first caller was Mr. Waddington, the vicar of the parish. He was a small, depressed-looking man, with cold eyes and a complaining voice.

"Rosteague told me you were stopping here for quite a long time," he said.

"Is that the Mr. Rosteague with the pretty wife, who keeps the farm by the bridge?"

"Yes; he is a dear fellow, much too good to be wasted on farming in Cornwall. His father was a farmer, and so was his grandfather, but Edward always had ideas above his station, and he was educated at a grammar school in Plymouth. He is the mainstay of our choir, you know; he has a magnificent light baritone voice—or, to be accurate, I believe it is what musicians call a *tenore robusto*. It is a great convenience to have a man who can sing either the tenor or the bass part of a hymn as occasion may require. I believe if he were taken up he would do well as a public singer, or something of that sort. Or at least he would have done if he had not married. I did my best to prevent it, but you know what a young man is when he fancies he is in love."

"Isn't the marriage a success, then?"

"Oh, as marriages go. Mrs. Rosteague is perfectly respectable and a very capable woman. She is a good cook and a good mother, and no doubt she would make an excellent wife to the average farmer. But Edward Rosteague has a higher nature that needs sympathy."

"Mummie, why do you laugh at Mr. Waddington?" said Cherry, when he had gone. "He is nothing to laugh at. He is very rude, and he took no notice of me. And he didn't say anything nice about anybody. Isn't he pleased with anything?"

After the first novelty of her surroundings had worn off, Mrs. Abingdon began to be rather bored. Inquiring into the social resources of the neighbourhood, she discovered that the local doctor was a man she had known before her marriage. At that time he had amused her by his persistent refusal to become one of her admirers. In response to a letter he called upon her on his way up from seeing a patient in the Cove. Dr. Jewell was a tall, slack-jointed man, with a bushy beard and bright brown eyes. He was still unmarried.

"Can I ask the Rosteagues to supper with me?" she asked him, when they had quarrelled afresh over old times.

“Of course, if you want to,” he said; “but why should you?”

“I want to hear Mr. Rosteague sing.”

“He can sing,” he admitted.

“Is he spoilt, then?” she asked, struck by his grudging tone.

“He’s not a bad sort of a chap, but he doesn’t know his luck.”

“Oh!” she said, smiling maliciously, “then I’ll ask you to supper too.”

“All right,” he said, but not very willingly.

When Mrs. Abingdon asked Mrs. Rosteague if she and her husband would come to supper, she added—

“I’m expecting Dr. Jewell; I know he’s a great friend of yours.”

“Oh yes!” said Annie, in a frank tone of pleasure. She called her husband and introduced him to Mrs. Abingdon. He blushed and stammered like a great boy when she spoke to him.

“Please bring some songs, Mr. Rosteague,” she said, eyeing him with amused appreciation, “I hear you have a remarkable voice.”

The supper was a great success. They had some fish, mutton cutlets, a delicious pudding with jam at the bottom and whipped cream at the top, and Gruyère cheese. Dr. Jewell did not talk much, and Rosteague was rather

nervous and ill at ease—anxious about his wife's behaviour. He was not sure how the pudding ought to be eaten, and so he waited until he saw Mrs. Abingdon take up her fork to it. Annie unembarrassedly ate hers with a spoon, and had a second helping. They drank a red Italian wine, or rather, Mrs. Abingdon and Jewell did. When Edward was asked if he would drink wine, he said, "No, thank you." Mrs. Abingdon looked surprised, and said, "Oh, but you must!" He coloured and said that he never drank wine, and she said, "Well, have some beer, then?" and would have rung the bell. Edward hesitated and grew redder still, but Annie said, "My husband is a total abstainer."

"Oh, what a very quaint thing to be, Mr. Rostague," said Mrs. Abingdon, and went on with her supper. Edward felt humiliated and angry with his wife. He was already vexed with her for shaking hands with Mrs. Oats when she let them in. He wished, too, that she would not talk about such common subjects as cooking and children's clothes. Mrs. Abingdon was not in evening dress, but the blouse she wore was cut rather low at the neck and the sleeves were made of some transparent material. Rostague thought he had never seen anything so dainty, and he would have

been astonished if Mrs. Abingdon had told him that his wife, in her plain gown of raw tussore silk, with her hair closely braided to her fine head, was one of the most exasperatingly well-turned-out women she had ever set eyes upon.

After supper, Mrs. Abingdon smoked a cigarette. Neither of the Rosteagues had ever seen a woman smoke before, and Annie was very much amused, but declined to try a cigarette herself. Jewell said it was a nasty habit. Mrs. Abingdon asked Edward for a match; his hand shook as he held it for her, and she touched his little finger with her own. She talked a great deal about her husband. Once she referred to a letter, holding it against her breast so that Rosteague could not avoid seeing the words, "My dear Irene," unless he looked in her eyes or stupidly on the floor. The words struck him as strangely cold applied to so dainty a creature. If he were married to Mrs. Abingdon he would not write to her as "My dear Irene." Then he coloured deeply, astonished at his own thoughts.

Rosteague really had a fine voice, though, for want of training, he was unable to make the most of it. He was hampered, too, by his wife's timidity and uncertainty as an accompanist. He sang a song of Schubert's, Salaman's "I Arise from Dreams of Thee,"

and one or two sentimental ballads of poor quality. Mrs. Abingdon listened attentively, and said something encouraging. Turning over his music, most of it brown with age and printed from stereotype plates, she came upon Beethoven's "Adelaide." "Oh, do you sing this?" she asked him, holding it up.

"He can," said Annie, who was delighted with the impression her husband's voice was making, "but I can't play the accompaniment."

"Will you let me try?" said Mrs. Abingdon modestly. She sat down to the piano, and he sang the noble song with a delighted feeling of inspiration and security.

"Oh!" said Annie, when it was over, "why did you let me make such an exhibition of myself, when you can play like that? Now I shall sit down and listen."

Mrs. Abingdon sang Brahms' passionate "*Mein Liebe ist Grün*," though, as she said, it was a man's song; and the new world of music it opened to Rostague filled him with vague discontent. Mrs. Abingdon was too sincere a musician to pay idle compliments, and under cover of a light prelude she said, "I'm going to talk to you very seriously. You have a good voice, but you don't practise half enough, and you sing some dreadful songs."

"I've no time for practising, now," he said gloomily.

"Oh, nonsense! with a gift like yours you ought to make time."

He glanced across to where his wife sat contentedly talking to Jewell, but said nothing. Mrs. Abingdon sighed.

"I suppose," she said, rising from the piano, "that on the whole it's better to have no aspirations."

Jewell stayed for a few minutes after the Rosteagues had gone.

"Well?" he said, smiling whimsically.

"Yes, you're right," she said, "he can sing. Isn't it a pity—"

"Oh, rot!" he said rudely; "if he isn't happy he ought to be."

"You're such a materialist!" she said indignantly.

"Well, are you prepared to produce the money to make an artist of him?"

"No, poor fellow, I wish I could. It would be quite worth while, even as an investment. But," she added, with a laugh, "I can give him a little sympathy."

"You might as well give him poison."

"By the way," she asked, "why wouldn't she let him have any wine?"

"Because when they first married he used

to drink too much. I guess she's done something better for him than give him—sympathy!"

IV

"He is an undeveloped genius," wrote Mrs. Abingdon in a letter to her husband, "fighting bravely against adverse circumstances. I am doing what I can to widen his horizon."

Before the letter reached her husband, however, she had one from him announcing his return to England earlier than he had expected. He would, in fact, join her in Cornwall before the end of May.

With a sympathetic listener, Rosteague's awkwardness soon wore off, and it was not surprising that the divine discontent she encouraged in him was identified with her personality. She, with her cleverness, her daintiness, her charming artificiality, represented the side of life his circumstances denied him, and a more acute observer than Mrs. Abingdon would have recognised that he cared less about his talent for its own sake than for the social success it might bring him. They spent many hours together over the piano, and it was only natural that her teaching should become less and less severely

technical and more and more concerned with what Mr. Waddington called his higher nature.

For some time Rosteague's vague and general repinings against Fate did not contain any grievance that even remotely touched his wife; but as his relations with Mrs. Abingdon became more confidential, he began to allude to the more concrete and particular hindrances to his development.

"If this awakening had only come four years ago!" he sighed, at the end of a practice.

"What awakening, Mr. Rosteague?" she asked, her hands on the keys.

He rolled up his music, blushed and stammered.

"Oh, of course, it's nothing to you!"

She did not answer then, but some days later she said, with apparent irrelevance—

"People can't go beyond their natures. I doubt if the most intimate friends — even husbands and wives — can really share each other's inner lives."

That, he thought, seemed to imply that she too found hindrance to her development in marriage.

Annie Rosteague was proud of her husband, and glad to see him appreciated, but it was hardly to be expected that she should watch

his growing intimacy with Mrs. Abingdon without some soreness. Her serene good sense, however, and the memory of her terrible first year of marriage, gave her a right value of the things that really mattered to her happiness. Her life was centred in her child, and so long as Edward kept sober and did not neglect his work she was inclined to let him confide his higher aspirations to whom he liked. His own uneasy feeling that he was injuring her sentimentally made him all the more attentive to her material comfort. He paid for the indulgence of his vanity by working harder and grumbling less.

Dr. Jewell took upon himself to tell Mrs. Abingdon that she was indiscreet.

"I thought you were so dead against social distinctions?" she said.

"So I am; but the whole thing depends on a distinction. If you weren't a pretty woman and he a good-looking young man there wouldn't be all this talk about tweedle-dum and tweedle-dee."

"How horrid you are!" she said plainly. "Like all Philistines, you think any thing to do with Art is immoral."

"When two people play at a game it is necessary that both should understand the rules," he retorted.

"Game!" she cried scornfully. "Anybody would think that the only serious things in life were beefsteaks and babies."

One day towards the end of May, when Rosteague went in to dinner, he found his wife in a state of anxiety about little Felix. All the morning he had been languid and fretful, crying in a peculiar, metallic tone.

"Don't you think you'd better ride over for Dr. Jewell?" she said.

At any other time Edward would probably have said "Yes," but he had arranged to take Mrs. Abingdon for a sail that afternoon. He did not explain this, but merely said he was very busy.

"He seems all right now," he said, bending over the child, who was indeed sleeping quietly on the settle.

But Annie was not reassured, and, irritated by her persistence and his own feeling of dishonesty, he said—

"The fact of the matter is, you want an excuse for seeing Jewell. All right, send for him, but don't expect me to carry your messages."

Annie whitened, but said nothing, and he flung out of the house.

Mrs. Abingdon was waiting for him on the little quay. Directly he saw her he noticed a change in her manner.

"I really don't think I ought to come to-day," she said nervously. "I've just had a telegram from my husband. He landed at Southampton yesterday, and he will be here some time this afternoon. Naturally I should like to be in when he comes."

He recognised the opportunity to do the right thing, but some perversity prevented his taking it with a good grace.

"As you like," he said sulkily.

She hesitated, and perhaps feeling that she owed him something, said—

"Well—we might go out for a little while. I don't suppose my husband can get here before five, and it really is a beautiful afternoon."

Neither of them got much enjoyment out of their sail. Rosteague was moody and silent, and she a little frightened. She had begun to see that possibly he had not understood the rules. When the time came for them to put about, and they were once more in sight of the little harbour, he said harshly—

"So it all ends!"

"Oh no, I hope not," she murmured.

"What is there left for me?" he asked bitterly. "The life of a clod; the dull struggle for existence, with no one to help, no one to understand."

“ You have your music.”

“ What is my music without you? ”

“ I—” she began falteringly.

“ Oh, you’re not so blind as not to see that I love you, that—”

“ Mr. Rosteague, you must not say that! ” she interrupted him sharply. But he was reckless now.

“ I will say it, and you shall hear me,” he cried, and before she could prevent him had seized her hand and kissed it.

“ How dare you! ” she cried, crimsoning. “ How—how ridiculous! ” and she began to laugh hysterically. That maddened him, and in one wild incoherent speech he poured out all his wounded vanity, self-pity, shame, remorse and anxiety.

“ You’re a wanton creature! ” he cried; “ you drew me on and taught me to despise a woman who’s worth ten of you. And now you’re afraid, because your husband is coming here.”

“ You dreadful man! ” she said, glaring at him, “ I wish I had never seen you. If you say another word I shall throw myself into the sea! ”

V

He lowered the sail and sullenly pulled into the little harbour. Cherry stood on the quay

hand in hand with a lean, tall, middle-aged man. Rosteague involuntarily glanced at Mrs. Abingdon for some sign of embarrassment, but she smiled and waved her hand to the two figures with a welcoming gesture.

“That is my husband,” she said.

“So I supposed,” he muttered, without looking at her. He pulled a few strokes in silence.

“Mr. Rosteague,” she said.

“Well?”

“Won’t you be friends?”

He was quite cool now, and derived a mean satisfaction from her evident anxiety about his behaviour in her husband’s presence.

“I should not presume,” he said quietly.

They came to at the foot of a chain ladder. Mrs. Abingdon threw up an affectionate greeting to her husband and a warning to Cherry, who had moved too near the edge of the quay. Major Abingdon spoke gaily to his wife, but Rosteague fancied that he looked at him with a curious expression. He handed Mrs. Abingdon to the ladder, directing her feet upon the crazy rungs, while her husband knelt above with outstretched hand. From the boat below Rosteague saw them kiss. They moved away, each holding one of Cherry’s hands.

He climbed to the quay and was filling his

pipe when he heard light footsteps behind him. Mrs. Abingdon had come back.

"Oh, Mr. Rosteague," she said in a frightened voice, "I think you ought to make haste home. Your little boy is ill."

The defiant smile with which he had faced her died away.

"Oh, I'm so sorry," she said impulsively, putting her hand on his arm.

"Don't touch me!" he muttered. He brushed rudely past her and hurried along the quay. Mrs. Abingdon rejoined her husband.

"He seems terribly upset, poor chap," he said.

"I'm afraid so," she murmured, taking his arm.

"They couldn't find him, you know, and when somebody said he'd taken you for a sail I offered to bring the message. I thought you'd manage to tell him tactfully."

Rosteague hurried up the hill and along the road through the valley. At every turn he expected to meet somebody bringing the worst news. He thought that the few persons he encountered looked at him compassionately. The five steps in front of the house seemed like five hundred. He pushed open the door and fell against Dr. Jewell, who was washing his hands in a tin bowl placed on a chair.

Jewell glanced at him, and his eyes returned to his finger-nails as he pushed down the skin with a corner of the towel.

"He'll do now," he said, before Rosteague could frame a question, "but it was touch and go. Croup. I ought to have been fetched two hours earlier."

Rosteague dropped into a chair. The doctor looked at him as if he were about to speak, but smiled instead, and went on with his toilet. Mrs. Rosteague stood motionless by the settle which had been drawn up beside the slab. The only sounds were the ticking of the tall clock and the child's quick breathing and an occasional whimper of pain. Dr. Jewell threw down the towel and took out his watch. He bent over the child, and Rosteague humbly watched his face as if he would learn from it the promise of life.

"Now don't worry," said Jewell, placing his hand on Annie's shoulder with such grave tenderness that Rosteague went hot with shame, remembering his last words to her. "You'll be surprised to see how soon that child will be running about again. Don't sit up. Your husband can do anything that's necessary."

He picked up his cap and, with a nod to Rosteague, went out of the kitchen. Rosteague followed him down the steps.

"Is it all right?" he stammered. The doctor stooped to examine his bicycle.

"Looks as if a new chain wouldn't do any harm!" he said, and then, straightening himself—

"Who, your wife?"

"The boy."

"Oh!" said the doctor, studying him from his great height, "the boy's all right. I was thinking about your wife, Rosteague. I don't like to see a woman so quiet. She's thin and depressed. You should take her out more and brighten her up. We can't spare women like Mrs. Rosteague. Well—good-night."

He turned and wheeled his machine up the hill. Rosteague felt an odd mingling of pride and remorse. He returned to the kitchen, closed the door and went over and stood by the settle. Annie had sat down. The silence became unendurable.

"Annie!" he said. She neither moved nor spoke.

"Won't you forgive me," he murmured. She looked at him wonderingly.

"What have I to forgive?" she asked. "I get plenty to eat and enough to wear; what more can any woman want?"

"Haven't you a kind word for me?" he said weakly.

"You don't belong to come to me for kind words," she said, and turned away.

He went and stared moodily out of the window, while Annie, her chin on her hand, bent over the child. Presently Rostague saw the little servant from the boarding-house crossing the bridge. He wondered what she wanted. A few hours ago he would have gone outside and taken her message out of his wife's hearing, but his new pride prevented him. He left the window and sat down beside the slab.

The girl gave her message in a high-pitched voice.

"Please, Mrs. Abingdon hopes that the baby is better, and please here's the money for the boat."

"The baby is better, thank you," he said in a loud voice, without moving. The girl gasped "I'm glad," and putting the money, two half-crowns, on the corner of the table, left the room.

Rostague sat staring at the two pieces of silver. He understood why Mrs. Abingdon had sent them. She did not want to insult him, but only to keep up appearances before her husband. Suddenly the absurdity of the whole thing struck him like a blow in the face. He leaned back in the chair and laughed long and bitterly.

Annie looked round at him with sombre eyes. Still laughing, Rosteague pointed to the two coins. His wife took them up with an expression of sorrowful wonder, and looked at him as if he could explain. Then she turned away her head and burst into a passion of weeping.

III

FLIMSY

ON a bright June morning Oscar Tutton lingered to look at the pansies, carnations, and sweet peas that made his little front garden the pride of Kimberley Road, S.W. It was now ten minutes to nine, and at half-past he was due in the office of Kent and Marsden, leather merchants, of Lower Thames Street. Oscar was a delicate looking man with small, pale features and a neat black moustache. His wife, Gwendoline, hung on his arm and talked about curtains.

"I saw a pair at Willox's at seventeen and eleven," she said. "Of course we should want the two pair. Since the people next door put up their Liberty stuff I'm ashamed to look at our windows."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Oscar absent-mindedly, and stooping to tie up a carnation.

"I don't believe you care a bit," she said, giving his arm a shake.

"Yes I do," he said, recalling his attention

with an effort from his beloved flowers, "but I wanted to save up all the spare cash we have for the holidays. I should like to get away to the seaside this year."

"What's the good of the seaside?" she grumbled; "nothing to do but chuck stones in the water."

"Well, we'll talk it over again," he said, rather wearily. "Give us a kiss."

"The idea! And all the neighbours looking."

However, behind a syringa she submitted, and Oscar hurried off down the road to take the tram at the corner. Gwendoline stood at the gate craning her neck till he was out of sight. She was a pretty little thing with fair, fluffy hair, at present bearing a crop of curling-pins, pink cheeks, light blue eyes, a tip-tilted nose, and a receding chin.

Oscar was now earning £200 a year, and socially the Tuttons more than held their own in Kimberley Road. They kept a maid with tails, and on the bamboo table in the hall there was a Japanese tray for the cards of callers. The curate took tea with them nearly every Saturday, and once a year Oscar gave a little dinner to his friends from the City. On this occasion Gwendoline wore a blouse cut into a discreet V at the neck, but Oscar did not dress. They were not on visiting terms with their

next-door neighbours. They had reason to believe that the people on the right were not really married, and the man on the left was only a butcher. The Tuttons had no children.

Gwendoline returned to the house and entered the dining-room, which was separated from the drawing-room by folding doors. It was furnished with a "saddlebag" suite and a sideboard of deal painted to look like fumed oak. She poured herself out another cup of coffee, lit a cigarette, and read through the amusement guide of the *Daily Telegraph*. Gwendoline did not really like smoking, but the ladies in the serial stories nearly all smoked cigarettes. Oscar did not know that she smoked or he would have put his foot down, and for all his quiet ways she was afraid of him. When she had half finished her cigarette, Gwendoline felt languid and began to yawn. She could hear Louisa bumping about upstairs, but she could not summon up energy to go and help her tidy the bedroom. Concealing the remains of her cigarette behind the stained-glass fire-screen, she went into the drawing-room, which contained several chairs with heart-shaped seats upholstered in pink velvet, an occasional table of Moorish design, a standard lamp with a pink satin shade, a broken, three-legged cake-stand, and a cottage piano. On the walls,

which were papered in imitation of watered silk, there were a bamboo overmantel and pictures of "Nydia the Blind Girl," "Aspatia," fully draped but in an improper attitude, and a rustic young woman fondling a puppy. Gwendoline sat down to the piano and played a waltz, a march of Sousa's, and the first page of a light piece by Madame Chaminade. On the second page there were some rather difficult arpeggios for the left hand, and though Gwendoline had had the piece for eighteen months she had never got any further with it. Through the wall she could hear the butcher's eldest daughter practising *Plaidy* with slow determination. The sound affected her disagreeably as a disregard of social distinctions, and after yawning and tinkling for a few minutes longer she went into the kitchen.

"Oh, you've finished the bedroom," she said to Louisa, who was now peeling potatoes; "why didn't you call me?"

"Oh, it's all right, Mrs. Tutton," said Louisa, a black-haired girl with a sly smile.

Gwendoline had tried to get her first maid to call her "Ma'am," but a series of changes had taught her discretion. With each new servant she adopted a manner of extreme haughtiness easing down to a fawning familiarity. Occasionally she remembered her position, and

sat in the drawing-room inventing excuses to ring the bell. But it was a little tiresome to spend her mornings in this way. She could not make her own dresses, and she could not afford to read much because the only sort of reading she cared about was that contained in penny weekly papers.

"What would you like for lunch, Mrs. Tutton?" asked Louisa.

"Oh, I don't know," said Gwendoline vaguely; "there's some of that tinned tongue left, isn't there? And I'll get some vanilla sandwiches from Padgates. That and a cup of tea will do for me."

Having given her orders, she lingered in the kitchen. Louisa composed herself for conversation. They talked about the woman next door, with a great many "I says" and "She says." A listener would have understood that the woman next door was too good-looking and too happy to be lawfully wedded.

At half-past eleven Gwendoline took her hair out of curling-pins and went shopping. That is to say, she looked in a great many shop windows, got her vanilla sandwiches, and went to the railway station, where she tried a new sweet from the automatic machine and bought three papers at the bookstall. Each of the papers contained the pattern of a blouse and the instalment of a serial story. On her way

home Gwendoline skimmed through one of the serials. It was about a Duchess who agreed to commit adultery with a Captain apparently for a dinner at the Carlton. Fortunately Fate, in the person of a chauffeur, who was really an Italian Prince, intervened, and the Duchess died imploring the golden-haired governess to be a mother to her children.

Influenced by her reading, Gwendoline was very distant to Louisa at lunch time, found fault with her appearance, and made her take out a plate and dust it. Louisa bore her severity with meekness, and later imitated it for the benefit of the servant next door. After lunch Gwendoline smoked a cigarette, read the other two serials, and slept for half an hour on the sofa. At three o'clock she went upstairs to change her dress. While doing her hair she stood at the open window without her bodice, and carried on a friendly and allusive conversation with Louisa, in which proper names were represented by "you know who" and "somebody." She put on a pretty grey-green gown, with a long tail, which emphasised her narrow hips, and lace dropping over her hands, and a large hat with roses under the brim.

At the end of Kimberley Road Gwendoline took an electric tram for a penny stage towards town. She descended at the gates of a small

park where a band was playing. Directly she was inside the gates there was a remarkable change in her walk, as if it were affected by the music. Holding her skirt in her left hand, and her parasol in her right, she slowly paced the gravel with an exaggerated movement of her hips.

There were a considerable number of people in the park, chiefly women and children, a few out-of-works drooping on the seats, and a sprinkling of young men in Panama hats, walking about in twos and threes, smoking cigarettes. Gwendoline walked three times round the bandstand without meeting a single acquaintance. Her manner in passing the young men was unnecessary hostile. She had brought a bag of chocolates with her and one of the penny papers, and when the band stopped she sat down on an unoccupied seat and began to read. Presently two pimply youths with very high collars sat down beside her. They talked loudly, but withal nervously, about a "grand tear round" they had had the night before at some place of entertainment. Gwendoline listened for a few minutes, and then coughed and looked slowly up and past them with an expression of slightly pained surprise. They turned very red and fell silent, and presently moved away. Gwendoline

returned to her reading. A heavy step on the gravel made her ears tingle. Looking over the edge of her paper she saw a tall man coming slowly along the walk. He was clean shaved and brown, with shrewd eyes, a big nose, boldly curved, and a delightfully wicked mouth and jaw. He rolled slightly in his walk, and instead of a cigarette he smoked a cigar, but not in the spectacular manner associated with that form of tobacco in the society with which Gwendoline was familiar. He might have been any age from thirty to forty. Gwendoline thought that he must be "in the Navy." Or perhaps he was an actor. He was "fast," anyhow, she decided. As he passed, she fancied that he glanced at her with interest.

Gwendoline was quite respectable, but it must be admitted that what brought her almost daily to the park was the vague expectation of an adventure. She did not go so far as to speculate what she should say or do if a man addressed her. The ordinary puppy she could and did keep at a distance, but one never knew when some dreadfully persistent person would make advances. Gwendoline kept her eyes fixed on her paper, and her heart beat a little quicker. The man passed out of sight, but experience and observation

taught her to sit still. In a few minutes she heard the steady crunching of his feet upon the gravel. She waited until he was immediately before her, and then looked up with her usual overdone expression of indifference. The man was looking at her with a smile which she was not experienced enough to recognise was one of disinterested amusement. She was disconcerted at finding a serene front where she had expected confusion: her eyes hung on his for a moment, and finally she smiled embarrassedly. The man looked surprised, but his smile broadened: he lifted his hat and came across to her. The seat creaked under him, completing his masterful effect, as he deliberately sat down.

"Jolly day, isn't it?" he began.

"I'm afraid I haven't the pleasure," said Gwendoline, a little pale, and breathing quickly.

"Well, it isn't too late," he said, laughing frankly. She giggled but drew in her lips.

"What I meant was I think you've made a mistake."

"I guess not," said the man quietly. He was looking her over dispassionately, but not insolently. Gwendoline said nothing.

"Fond of reading, Miss—Miss——?"

"Miss Delamere, if you will be so persistent."

The man's lips tightened to conceal a smile. It had not occurred to Gwendoline that to a keen observer her wedding ring was plainly visible through her glove.

"My name's Burrell," he said; "John Burrell."

"Do you often come here, Mr. Burrell?" she asked him.

"No, it's all new to me. I'm just back from Canada. I was born here, but it was all country then. My mother lives here still—built-in, I tell her."

Gwendoline was not interested in his mother.

"Isn't the band lovely?" she said mincingly, as a solo instrument with exaggerated sentiment gave out the introduction to a waltz.

"Very pretty," he said absently. "Fond of music?"

"I love it," she said, closing her eyes with a sigh.

"Theatres, too, eh?"

"Yes," she admitted: "but I'm very particular who I go with."

"Can't be too particular," he agreed.

Gwendoline was a little disappointed. It would have been impossible for her to go to the theatre with him but she would have liked the privilege of refusing.

"What do you do with yourself all day?" he next inquired.

"Oh, I have my studies," she said airily.

"Are you studying anything in particular?"

"No—just what takes my fancy."

"Languages, eh?"

"A little," she modestly confessed.

"Then I suppose you have a great many social engagements?"

"Yes," she said judiciously; "but I'm rather one to keep myself to myself."

He threw away an extravagant portion of his cigar, and said—

"What do you say to a cup of tea?"

"Oh, I couldn't think of it."

"Why not? No harm in a cup of tea."

"P'raps not," she said, smoothing out her dress, "but I never allow gentlemen to give me anything."

"Very good rule," he admitted, and remained silent for some time. Fearing that she had discouraged him, Gwendoline said brightly—

"Do you know, I'm sure I've seen you somewhere."

"Indeed," he said; "I wonder where it was."

"I can't think," she said, knitting her brows; "must have been at a ball."

"Very likely," he said, with an air of sagacity. Gwendoline began to feel that his conversation did not do justice to his appearance.

"Well," she said, looking at the watch on her wrist, "I really must be going."

"Oh, where's the hurry?"

"But I have to be in by six—I have a music lesson."

"Well, shall I see you again?" he said, smiling, as they stood up.

"Oh, I can't promise. You mustn't think I'm in the habit of meeting strange gentlemen."

"But if you've seen me before?"

"Of course that makes it a *little* different," she said, making patterns on the gravel with the toe of her shoe. "Still—I don't know what to say."

"Look here," he said. "How would you like a ride in a motor?"

Her startled "O—oh!" free from all affection, answered him.

"How about to-morrow at three?"

"It seems rather funny," she demurred, "seeing I've only met you to-day."

"Stuff! Why shouldn't you have a little pleasure?"

After some argument she agreed to the justice of this, and he arranged to pick her up on the morrow by the church at the third corner from Kimberley Road. Then she bade him a hasty good-bye, and hurried out of the

park. She did not look round until she had climbed to the top of a tram, and by that time Mr. Burrell had disappeared.

Gwendoline was in a fine flutter, frightened and pleased at the same time, and by no means certain whether she would have courage to keep her engagement. That evening Oscar came home looking more tired than usual, but he had remembered to bring her some roses and a basket of raspberries. Though impatient of his homely ways and love of gardening, she was as fond of him as her shallow nature would allow, and by bedtime she had quite made up her mind that all along she had never meant to do more than punish Mr. Burrell for his forwardness by playing him a trick. But in the morning she had to ask Oscar for extra housekeeping money. He grumbled a little, and left her with a grievance. At the end of the long, aimless morning she was ready for any distraction, and, after all, there could be no harm in a motor ride.

She dressed herself with pains and, after she left the house, bought a motor veil and tied it on. As she hurried to the waiting place it occurred to her that perhaps Mr. Burrell might have been only joking. She knew then that she would be horribly disappointed if he failed her. But there he was, at the corner, looking

more masterful than ever in his leather coat and goggles.

Gwendoline could not help feeling that her Don Juan was a remarkably phlegmatic individual, though, indeed, until they were clear of the suburb his attention was pretty well occupied with the car. They went southward, through pleasant country, with increasing speed, until the big car seemed to tear the hedges apart. Occasionally Mr. Burrell named a village as they whizzed through it, but the names meant nothing to Gwendoline. She was much too excited to talk. She held on and thought about police-traps, half hoping that they would fall into one. The distinction of having her name coupled with that of a member of the aristocracy—for she believed that Mr. Burrell concealed a title—in a newspaper report would more than make up for the scandal in Kimberley Road. At the end of an hour or so they slowed down and stopped at a little inn that was exactly like an inn she had seen on the stage. There was a great elm before the door, with a swinging sign, a tilted waggon in the road and a man asleep on a bench with a quart pot on the table in front of him.

“Well, what would you like?” said Mr. Burrell; “tea or—something else?”

A little dazed, Gwendoline said she would

have tea, though she wished she had courage to ask for wine.

"That's right," said Mr. Burrell encouragingly. "I don't like little girlies to dip their beaks in men's drinks."

A motherly-looking landlady in a print frock showed them into a small parlour with a low ceiling and uneven walls papered with a trellis of honeysuckle. The room smelt not unpleasantly of mildew, and roses bobbed at the lattice window. There were oleographs on the walls of the late Queen receiving the Duke of Wellington in her dressing-gown, the Battle of Colenso, and a hunting scene. Mr. Burrell took off his coat and goggles, and asked her whether she wouldn't remove her veil. She kept well to the other side of the room, wondering what she should do when he began to make love to her. When tea was brought in he said she must pour it out. They sat down on opposite sides of the little, creaking table, and Gwendoline stripped off her long gloves.

"Oho!" said Mr. Burrell, pointing to her wedding ring. "Oho! Married, eh?"

Gwendoline was too flurried to see that his surprise was assumed. She blushed scarlet, but summoning up courage, said defiantly—

"I never said I wasn't."

"Oh, it's all the same to me," he said, with an appalling chuckle, "only you must be new at the game, or you'd have remembered to take that off. Anyhow, I'm not going to spoil your tea."

His own he seemed to enjoy consumedly, drinking four cups in large gulps. "Mind me smoking?" he asked, when she, with a sinking heart, had made a miserable pretence at a meal.

She shook her head. He lit a big cigar, and thrusting his thumbs in the armholes of his waistcoat leaned back in his chair.

"Well, what have you got to say for yourself?" he demanded.

"You seem to think—" she began, with a white face, and then changed her sentence to, "It doesn't follow because I'm married that I'm happy."

"Course not," he genially agreed.

Encouraged, she drew a pathetic but not very convincing picture of the unappreciated wife. She would not complain of her husband, she said, but he was like that.

Mr. Burrell listened, nodding at intervals.

"Other women?" he inquired.

Gwendoline intimated that she should like to catch him.

"Knock you about?"

"He's never actually struck me," said Gwendoline pathetically.

Mr. Burrell removed his cigar and looked at the end of it.

"More's the pity," he said.

Gwendoline sat up and gasped.

"There are more ways than one of being unkind," she said indignantly. "How do you know my life isn't a misery?"

"You're a liar," he said, leaning over the table and bringing his great red face close to hers. "You're a liar."

"I've never been so insulted in all my life!" said Gwendoline; "I shall go home at once." She jumped up, and with trembling hands tried to adjust her veil.

"Steady on," said Mr. Burrell, without moving. "Come here. Sit down."

Weeping, she obeyed.

"Now then," he said, "when you got on the tram yesterday you didn't see me nip into a hansom, did you? I followed you home, and, what's more, I hung around till your husband came home. You're not going to tell me that he's the sort of chap to treat any woman unkindly. Why, he brought you home a bunch of roses and a basket of strawberries!"

"They were r-raspberries," said Gwendoline faintly.

"Anyhow," said Mr. Burrell, "it's no use

talking to me about your husband. I know all about him."

This was more than doubtful, but the statement served its purpose.

"I only wanted to have a bit of fun," sobbed Gwendoline.

"Fun!" snorted the man. "Fun!"

"Well, what about you?" she asked, eyeing him over the corner of her handkerchief.

"Oh, I'm not going to excuse myself," he said. "Fun? I've had my fun. Fun? Lord! I could make your hair curl. But with women, mind, not little bits of fluff."

"You're a horrid man, and I wish I'd never seen you."

"I wouldn't say that," he said composedly; "you'll be glad some day. And as for what's his name, Percy, Harold——?"

"My husband's name is Oscar," she said, with sulky dignity.

"Oscar. I guess he'll have reason to be grateful to me for the rest of his life."

"You're not going to tell him!" she said in terror.

"Oh no," he said, "that wouldn't do at all. But I'm going to talk to you."

He got up, and stood with his hands thrust into his pockets, his great bulk darkening the window.

"Now, look here, Mrs.— No, never mind your name ; I don't want to know your name ; you'll never be anything to me but just one of the Flimsies. You're not worth that much," he snapped his fingers, "in yourself, but you can make all the difference to a man between heaven and hell. Just think of what you've got : a nice little home, front and back parlours, hot and cold water in the bathroom, Mary Jane with tails and all complete—and a man that believes in you, *trusts* you. And you'd chuck it all away for a little bit of fun, as you call it. If you meant to go wrong there'd be some sense in it, but you don't. You can't even take your fun, as you call it, with your whole heart, but you're ready to drop with fright all the time. Yes, you are!" he roared, as she shook her head. "That's the sickening thing about you : you don't mean anything. You haven't the grace to go right and you haven't the guts to go wrong, and before you know where you are you're landed in the devil of a mess and 'who'd have thought it.' Piccadilly is full of the girls who didn't mean anything. 'Tisn't vice, 'tisn't misery that brings them there, it's just flimsiness. For God's sake," he went on, heated with his own words, "begin to do something ; begin to be something. Get your husband to sack Mary Jane, and smut your silly little face

and harden your silly little hands with some sort of honest work. "However," he added, pulling out his watch, "I won't stand here preaching all day; and, besides, it's time we were getting back, or Percy—Harold—Oscar, I mean, will be asking questions, and that would never do."

He bundled her into the car and whirled her back to the church at the corner.

"Well, madam," he said, with a touch of old-fashioned politeness, as the car waited stuttering by the kerb, "thank you for the pleasure of your company, and if I've said anything to hurt your feelings I beg your pardon."

"Oh, it's granted," she said coldly.

He laughed and held out his hand.

"Good-bye, Flimsy. St! St! Scuttle!"

And she scuttled.

IV

THE GOLLIWOG

HILDA GARLAND came in through the French window, singing the opening phrase of the *Sapphic Ode* of Brahms. There was something in the broad, open notes of what Mr. Parkyn the organist called her “lower register” that gave Henry goose-flesh all down his back. She had a big bunch of roses in her hand, and with the conclusion of the phrase she thrust the dew-drenched, velvety, tea-scented blooms into his face, and said—

“There, little man.”

Her husband was at least her own height. Not quite recovered from his cold bath, he stood on the rug before the lilies on the hearth, with his hands behind his back. He winced a little as the prickles touched his newly shaved chin, sniffed perfunctorily, and said—

“Yes, they’re very nice.”

Hilda glanced at him sidelong, said, “Oh, did ‘ums,” on a deep, caressing note, and began to arrange the roses in a copper bowl

in the middle of the breakfast-table. As she leaned over he observed, to the aggravation of his general sense of grievance, that she was bare-legged, having thrust her feet into an old pair of dancing slippers. He moved rather stiffly to his place at the table, with his back to the garden, sat down, and unfolded his napkin. Hilda kicked her slippers, one at a time and with careful aim, at the fox-terrier on the rug, and sat down behind the coffee tray. For a few seconds the only sounds in the sunny, fragrant room were the chink of cups and saucers, and the subdued “Gar-r-rn-owch-owch-owch!” of the fox-terrier, as he dutifully worried the slippers he was too grown-up and too lazy to enjoy.

Less dutifully responsive than the dog to his wife’s morning mood, Henry ate his bacon in very small pieces and sipped his coffee with prim deliberation. With his elbows rather close to his sides, he might have been giving a child an object lesson in good manners. His wife, leaning gracefully in her chair, against a background of lilies, at the other end of the table, kept up a continual murmur of delight, of quick sighs and chuckles, and little dove-like moans, over the perfection of June, the joy of hot coffee, the bestness of everything in the bestest of worlds—as she told the fox-terrier.

There was nothing, as one would say, the matter with her. She was big and blonde, full-throated and amber-eyed; not pink, but goldily clear-skinned. Subtle squarenesses in the drawing of her eyelids, in the contour of her jaw, and in the outline of her rather large and pale-carnation mouth saved her from looking too soft and round. Her honey-coloured hair was loosely knotted, and she wore what Henry would have called "a sort of a tea-gown thing" of old rose, revealing a firmly modelled neck and arms of alluring whiteness. As she sat there in her dewy freshness, crunching buttered toast with her strong white teeth, she was a living contradiction to the platitude that a woman never looks well first thing in the morning.

It was not merely the sense of contrast that made Henry—who wasn't usually quite himself till after breakfast—feel injured by her look of well-being. Her look of well-being, her seductiveness, indeed, were factors in the thought which was troubling him, which had troubled him all night. He almost wished his wife wasn't so good-looking. He himself was a good-looking man of about thirty-five, a little too neat-featured, with the parting of his dark wavy hair a trifle too exactly centred. Instead of disappearing, the slight acidity of his expres-

sion deepened with the progress of the meal. His very nose looked pinched. His wife, who for all her nonchalant ease was very observant, was aware that something was wrong, but she didn't say, "What's the matter with you this morning?" as many women would have done. At last, with stammering and hesitation and qualifications, to make it sound as reasonable as possible, he out with the thought which was troubling him, and said—

"I think, you know, that it would be as well, perhaps, if you didn't see—make quite so much of young Layland."

Qualified and moderate as it was, the moment he had said it he knew he had said too much. Years ago Henry had slapped a young nephew—who wasn't used to being slapped—for some exasperating naughtiness. He would remember the look in the child's eyes as it said "Oh!"—the look, not of anger or physical pain, but of broken-hearted incredulity—until his dying day. Henry was a kindly man, and he had made a vow then never to slap a child again. The startled eyes of his wife reminded him of the startled eyes of the child. The piteous, wounded look went from them in a moment, however, and the "Oh!" she uttered wasn't a bit like the child's "Oh!" It was the slightly questioning "Oh!" of a person willing to be reasonable.

Disarmed by her reasonableness, Henry became fluent, though confused. He had felt sure, he said, with a nervous dig at the marmalade, that it would only be necessary for him to drop a word in season. He knew that it was mere thoughtlessness on her part. It was a horrid thing to have to say, of course, but it was better—wasn't it?—to say it now, before things had gone too far.

"Too far?" she murmured, opening her eyes a little wider.

"I mean, for him," said Henry doggedly, at the first hint of resistance. "He's young and impressionable. It's so easy for a romantic young man to mistake the kind of interest a woman takes in him. Of course, my dear girl, I don't mean to say that you need drop him altogether; that would be silly; but—only—Oh! hang it all, Hilda, it isn't necessary for me to tell you how to keep young Layland in his place."

"It isn't," she said; "but what is his place?"

"Well, his place isn't at your feet, anyhow," said Henry snappily, "with his head almost against your knees, or putting flowers in your hair, or reading Rossetti and thing-a-my-jig out of one book in the dark. One positively falls over him. It's ridiculous, that's what it is. But, as I said, though it's ridiculous now,

it might easily become serious. Particularly with a man of that sort."

"What sort?" she said, eyeing him gravely, with her chin on her hand.

"Oh, young Layland is all right, of course," he said hastily. "I've nothing against young Layland. Still, all that talk about souls is a bit unhealthy. And, after all, we don't really know anything about young Layland."

"You don't," she said.

"Well, isn't that enough?" he said, exasperated by her coolness. "That's just what they're saying. They blame me, you know; they say I ought to be more careful."

"Ah," she said, with quiet amusement, "they're talking. They put it into your head to speak."

"No, indeed they didn't," he said, flushing angrily. "I shouldn't have cared what anybody said. I may be a bit of a stick, but the long and short of it is I don't like it, and, having said so, that ought to be quite enough for you."

"It is, quite enough," said Hilda mildly. "Then, do you mean," she went on, "that you don't like me to have men friends?"

"I never said that," he declared hotly. "That's absurd. I've never objected to your having men friends. What about Renwick

and Cave? They come here often enough, and I'm always glad to see them."

"Renwick and Cave," she said, "are old women."

"Well, Hilda," he said, with dignity, "you needn't be vulgar. As I said, I regret very much having had to speak, but I only did my duty as a husband. However, I've said what I had to say, and I shan't mention it again."

Having said what he had to say he almost visibly dismissed the subject, and began to talk to Bob, the terrier, with unusual sprightliness, as if he had only deferred his response to his wife's morning mood until he had got rid of a disagreeable duty. Hilda seemed to bear him no ill-feeling. She chimed into the conversation with Bob quite gaily; almost too gaily.

When it was time for Henry to go to the station she wasn't immediately to be found, and he couldn't stop to look for her. During the two years they had been married she had never missed walking with him down the garden, and kissing him at the gate with the ever-new abandonment which made Henry feel that he was living in a fairy tale.

She was hurt, he recognised, and he felt sorry for her, but it had been necessary to hurt her. He had spoken for her good. He didn't suppose that she was in the slightest

degree disloyal to him, but she was rather inclined to be too impulsive, and a sentimental young fellow like Layland might easily mis-understand her.

Young Layland happened to be at the station. He came up to Henry with the frank friendliness, and at the same time deference for an older man, which made him so charming, and said that he would take that opportunity to say good-bye. He must put in some time with his people in London before he sailed. No, he wasn't going by that train ; he was merely seeing about having his luggage fetched. Did Garland think that Mrs. Garland would mind his dropping-in in the middle of the morning to say good-bye to her ?

Henry said that of course she wouldn't, and devoutly hoped that Hilda wouldn't have the bad taste to hint to young Layland that there had been a difference of opinion on his account. Henry felt sorry, now, that he had spoken—though he wouldn't admit that he hadn't been justified—and he had a sneaking sense of relief that this attractive and morbidly sentimental young man was going away. With his boyish good looks, his bright intelligence, his quick sympathy and engaging manners, he was a young man that any woman might fall in love with.

To do Henry justice, it was partly a fair-minded recognition of the comparative disadvantages Hilda had to put up with which had led him to speak. According to the story-books—and Henry unconsciously put great faith in story-books—she had some excuse for seeking a distraction which perfect propriety would not approve: a husband eight years older than herself, no children, and little congenial society. From the very first she hadn't fitted into the Roehurst circle. Roehurst was one of the “residential” suburbs, three miles out of Camberton, where Henry spent his working days, as junior partner in the banking firm of Raby and Garland. Henry's friends and relations—he had two aunts and a married sister living in Roehurst—were too well-bred to be hostile to his wife; but they accepted her with a mental reservation. They thought he ought to have married a Roehurst girl. At first their non-committal attitude had rather pleased Henry. Like most conventional and sober-minded men, he liked seeing people startled—providing he didn't have to do the startling himself—and it had been amusing to see the little flutter his wife made in Roehurst.

To begin with, she was almost improperly good-looking. As they said, every man wants a pretty wife, but there's a limit. They said

she would make him live beyond his means. She didn't. Comparing notes with his aunts, he found that she kept house on a smaller sum than they suggested as proper for his position. But, unlike most of the good housekeepers of Henry's acquaintance, she wasn't swallowed up in housekeeping. She seemed to have short-cuts of her own, and consequently a good deal of leisure. Yet she was never idle; she read, she played and sang, and she gardened, doing everything with a whole-hearted enjoyment and thoroughness, as if she were learning a new game.

For though, as Henry admitted, she had a good deal to put up with, she never seemed unhappy. She was much too positive to mope. When she didn't like a thing, she said so, and got it altered. She had, for example, laid ruthless hands upon the house he inherited from his parents; had turned out heavy furniture and dull pictures, and let in light and air and the magic of Art, so far as it might be attained by reproductions of the works of Leonardo and Botticelli and Rossetti and Watts and Whistler. Henry didn't understand all these works, but he saw that her enjoyment of them was as immediate as her enjoyment of chocolates, or dancing, or roses, and they seemed, with the chocolates and the dancing and the roses, to

enter in some mysterious way into the sinfully poignant thrill, which, after two years, he still received from the touch of her lips or the caress of her hand.

When they married everybody said that, as under-mistress of a girls' High School, she had of course done very well for herself. When it came out by a side wind that she had refused better chances than Henry, everybody said that of course she wanted a manageable husband. Their courtship had been short and wonderful. Lately Henry had begun to suspect that it had been a little too wonderful. He had met her in the most commonplace way, at a tennis dance on the other side of Camberton. He danced two dances with her, and sat out a third. Then he got an introduction to her mother, and called. Hilda hadn't behaved a bit like the coy maidens—and particularly the maidens engaged in scholastic work—of the story-books. After her first half-amused hesitation, when he stammeringly began to make love to her, she had responded with a rush that carried him off his feet. The first time he kissed her—she was the first girl he had ever kissed—he was almost frightened at the result. It made him think of the pagan loves of the people in the poems of Mr. Swinburne. At the time it had seemed to Henry

the most beautiful thing in the world to be loved like that. Lately he hadn't been quite so sure. The silly fool must needs try to find a reason in himself for being loved like that, and, as there wasn't any obvious reason, he questioned the reality of the love. He wanted justification by works, so to speak. He didn't understand the divine insanity of love; that she loved him like that because she did; that he was a singularly lucky dog, and there was an end of it.

Then, six weeks ago, young Layland had turned up in Roehurst. As Henry said, nobody knew much about him. He was understood to be going tea-planting in Ceylon; but he seemed to spend most of his time loafing about the country, and his only apparent occupations were playing the fiddle and sketching in water-colour. Henry took to him at once, and was one of the first people in Röehurst to ask him to dinner. Young Layland made no secret of his admiration of Hilda. On his first introduction to her, he blushed up to the roots of his fair hair, and gazed at her open-mouthed, with a startled expression of "I say!" There was nothing in the least offensive in his admiration, which at first pleased Henry. He asked young Layland to drop in whenever he liked—and he liked very often.

Still Henry didn't object; young Layland brought out another set of Hilda's apparently inexhaustible store of attractions, and her delight at getting somebody to play the fiddle to her accompaniment reacted in a still more bewitching fondness to Henry. Then people began to talk, and their talking unfortunately encouraged Henry in his disastrous quest of what Hilda could "see" in himself. There was plenty for any woman to "see" in young Layland. With his clean-cut features, slim, athletic frame, and brilliant youth, he resembled Henry's conception of the "Greek god" of the novelists. He might, indeed, have been one of the people out of Mr. Swinburne's poetry.

As Henry sat in the train on his way to business he thought over all this, and though he felt that he had been rather an ass to speak to Hilda—particularly since young Layland was going away—he wouldn't admit that he had no cause to speak. The friendship with young Layland was innocent enough, but one never knew how that sort of thing was going to end. She had been indiscreet, to say the least of it. It was only natural, he supposed, that she wouldn't admit that she had been indiscreet.

It was because she must feel that she had

been in the wrong that he felt sorry for her. During the day it occurred to him that, having for the first time since their marriage had to correct her, it would be rather nice to do something special to make it up. So he went to a bookshop, and, with a subtlety remarkable for him, bought her a new edition of *Omar Khayyám*, with pretty illustrations on vellum. He hoped that she would understand, from the nature of the gift, that his criticism of her unguarded familiarity with young Layland wasn't due to puritanical narrowness. Choosing the book made him lose his train, and he had to wait nearly an hour for another. Consequently, when he got home, Ann, the house-parlourmaid, with, he thought, an odd look of constraint, told him that Hilda had already begun dinner.

He went quietly into the dining-room, with the book in his pocket, intending—and even after two years he thrilled in anticipation—to put his hands over Hilda's eyes, draw back her head, and kiss her on the mouth before he dropped the gift into her lap. Hilda sat in her usual place, but on her right was what he first thought to be an uncommonly gaily-dressed child, but then perceived to be a large doll. It was of the kind known as Golliwogs. It was a Golliwog of the very largest size.

"What the——" he began, forgetting all about his intention.

"Isn't he too sweet?" said Hilda cheerfully, "I got him at Burkinshaw's for four and elevenpence-ha'penny."

Henry, feeling rather uncomfortable, went round to his place, and sat down before he said coldly, "What's the idea?"

"The idea? Oh, one must have somebody to pet, don't you know."

Henry recognised that this was the moment to say, "I was an awful ass this morning, and I want you to forget it," but his pride of logic wouldn't admit that he hadn't been justified. He contrived a weak smile, however, and said, "I suppose this is your get back on me for this morning."

"That," she said, "is my Golliwog. Oh, Henry, mayn't I have a Golliwog? Of course," she continued, with an abominably clever assumption of disappointment, "if I'd thought that your objection to my men friends extended to a poor harmless Golliwog, I——"

She was interrupted by the entrance of Ann to take away the soup. At the back of his head Henry had been thinking about Ann. She and the cook were Hilda's adoring slaves, but they were only human. Ann came in without turning a hair. She was a little redder

than usual, and she held her head stiffly, so that she shouldn't look at the Golliwog, and Henry could hear her stays creaking with suppressed breathing. The difficult moment passed ; the soup went out, the lamb came in, and Ann closed the door, upon what explosion Henry could only guess.

"I say," he said in a conciliatory tone, "a joke's a joke, but don't you think it's gone far enough?"

"Joke? What joke?"

"That silly thing."

She said, "I don't think it's very good taste to point at your guests with the carving-knife, or to criticise them in their presence."

"I wonder you care to make me ridiculous before the servants," said Henry severely.

"You ridiculous? But he isn't your Golliwog. He's my Golliwog—bless him. Unless, of course—"

Her lips quivered, but she maintained an innocent gravity. She was in white this evening, foamy and delicious. A copper-coloured rose at her breast emphasised the strange beauty of her eyes. Henry controlled his temper, but he was determined to make her see his point, that he was technically in the right, and he said, "I'm sorry if I hurt your feelings this morning, but I still maintain—"

“Really, Henry,” she said, wilfully misunderstanding him, “you’re making an absurd fuss about a Golliwog.”

“It isn’t the Golliwog,” he said, raising his voice a little, “it’s your having it, and the reason.”

“But I *like* my Golliwog,” she said purringly, and tucking in the silk at her breast.

“Well, I don’t,” snapped Henry.

“No,” she said. “I think, you know,” she went on reflectively, “that you’re very unreasonable, Henry. I shouldn’t have said that Golly was ‘the sort of man’ that any husband could object to. You remember what Gérard de Nerval said to the police, when they objected to his leading a lobster about the boulevards by a blue ribbon? ‘He’s a beautiful colour, he knows the sea’s secret, and he doesn’t bark.’”

This was gratuitous; Henry’s acquaintance with the French language was rudimentary, and Hilda and young Layland had unintentionally annoyed him by quoting French poets to each other.

“Well,” she continued, “Golly isn’t nearly so good-looking as you are, he doesn’t talk about music or poetry, and I promise you that you’ll never fall over him in the dark. It seems to me that you’re difficult to please in the matter of my men friends.”

Henry gave it up. It was a feeble joke, anyhow, he thought, and perhaps the best way was to let her carry it on until she recognised its feebleness. They finished their meal in silence, and then she said—

“We’re going to have our coffee in the garden, by the syringas. Will you join us?”

“Augh!” he said.

“Come along then, Golly,” she said, lifting the absurd creature from its chair, “the little husband seems cross. Mind, Henry,” she said, catching an evil glance from the tail of his eye as she passed him, “if you destroy him, I shall get another. You’ll find it expensive.” He heard her jödelling in her clear voice, as she went down the garden, “And ano—o—ther, and ano—o—ther, and ano—o—ther!”

Henry spent a miserable evening. It was absurd, he argued, to take the thing seriously, and yet—there it was. He couldn’t bring himself to try to make it up with his wife, with that creature between them. When they parted for the night—the Golliwog was beside her on the sofa—he tried not to seem sulky, and she hoped, considerately, that he would sleep well. By morning, he thought, she would have got tired of the joke.

But in the morning the Golliwog was there to breakfast. It was there to dinner. Hilda was

in her usual spirits, and quite unembarrassed. Henry began to be alarmed. Supposing it wasn't a joke after all? For all her joyous sanity there was a queer strain in Hilda—indeed it was part of her agitating charm. After dinner Henry strolled round to see his friend, Dr. Nevinson. He found him watering his asters. The homely figure in the torn flannel trousers, the burnt pipe, the familiar smell of hot, wet earth, all made Henry's mission more difficult. He followed Nevinson from plant to plant, talking disjointedly, and finally said—

“I say, Nevinson, I want to talk to you about my wife.”

“Oh!” said Nevinson, straightening his back, with a rising accent of concern, “isn't she well?”

“She seems all right, but——”

Nevinson tactfully stooped to loosen the crust of earth round a seedling.

“She's all right—physically,” said Henry, with an effort, “but, to tell you the truth, I'm worried about her mind.”

“Oh, my dear chap,” said the doctor incredulously.

“Fact of the matter is she's taken up with a Golliwog,” Henry blurted out in desperation.

“With a what!” cried Nevinson, putting down his watering-can.

“With one of those dam Golliwog things. You know, black woolly dolls,” said Henry, in a quick, earnest murmur.

Nevinson made a noble effort to preserve his gravity, but finally went off into a howl of laughter.

“Ssh ! you fool, your wife will hear us,” said Henry, scowling at him. “It’s all very well to laugh, but it’s serious, I can tell you. Of course, if you like to treat your patients as a joke——” He half turned to go.

“No, no, no !” said Nevinson, still spluttering, but with a hand on Henry’s arm.

He soothed the injured man, and asked him a question that caused him to say impatiently : “No, no ; it isn’t that. Wish it was.”

“Well, doesn’t she give any reason ?” said Nevinson, whose scientific curiosity was aroused.

“Not exactly,” said Henry, after a moment’s hesitation. “We had a little difference about —oh, about a small matter, and this seems to be her way of showing her resentment.”

Nevinson made a queer, strangled noise, and asked if Henry would like him to look in.

“Not while I’m at home,” said Henry hastily ; and then it was agreed that Nevinson should make an opportunity to beg some of Hilda’s carnations.

With what Henry could not help feeling was indecent alacrity, he did so the next day.

“One of the sanest people I’ve ever met,” he reported to Henry in the evening. “I didn’t see—your friend,” he added, with unconcealed disappointment; “but it can’t be anything more than a girlish freak. She’ll get tired of it—if you don’t play into her hands!” He went on to say that he’d often remarked to his wife that though they would be sorry to lose the Garlands, he wondered Henry didn’t move over to the other side of Camberton, where there was more and livelier society.

“Mrs. Garland is wasted here,” he said, with a doctor’s liberty. “We’re a stuffy lot in Roehurst.”

The next evening, at dinner, the inevitable happened. Ann, coming into the room with melted butter, let fall an unguarded look upon the Golliwog, and all her loyal service went to pieces. Hastily setting the butter-boat on the table, she dropped upon a chair, legs extended, heels hammering the floor, cap awry, and to the “whang whang” of the falling tray she “hoo-hoo-hooed!” like a woodpecker.

“Oh, missis; oh, master; oh, master; oh, missis; I can’t help it!” she cried. “Oh, the Gug-gug-gug-golliwog!”

Henry got up with an oath, marched out of

the room and slammed the door. Rhythrical repetitions of "Oh-ee-ee! The Gug-gug-golliwog!" pursued him to his den.

Hilda soothed the rocking girl, who seemed likely to be dangerously affected by her long-suppressed outburst.

"I can't stop another hour. I'll sacrifice my wages," she moaned through her apron. Hilda said that Ann had better take a month's holiday, and she left the house that evening. When Henry had recovered his temper so far as to be able to think coherently, he said to himself, "Now she's beaten; she'll have to give in." He didn't know Hilda. The next morning she went to a servants' registry office in Camberton and asked for what, I believe, is known as a "supply." In an incredibly short time four candidates came out to Roehurst. Three she dismissed after examination as unsuitable; but the fourth, a tall, painfully thin, expressionless, middle-aged woman she engaged "for her looks." When Hilda had explained her duties and arranged her two evenings a week to go to chapel, she said—

"Oh, by the way, you'll find your master very considerate, but he has one peculiarity. He has an extraordinary affection for a—a sort of doll, a Golliwog. You know what a Golliwog is?"

"Yes'm. A black woolly doll. Same as children play with."

"Exactly. Well, your master doesn't play with it, but he likes it near him at meals. It was given him," said Hilda, with downcast eyes, "by a very dear friend."

"Yes'm. I understand 'm. I knew a gentleman—"

"Never mind the gentleman—Caroline, I think you said your name was? At breakfast, then, and dinner, you are to lay a place for the Golliwog, just as you do for us—on your master's right. Not at luncheon—unless he happens to be at home. Nor when we have company. Your master only needs it when he is lonely."

"Very well 'm. Is that all 'm?"

"That is all, Caroline, thank you."

At the door the gaunt figure hesitated. "Please 'm. How do I speak of it—'im? As Master Golly?"

"As Master Golly," said Hilda firmly.

As soon as the door closed Hilda flung herself on the sofa, stuffed her handkerchief into her mouth, and drummed with her heels in a silent convulsion.

Caroline was colossal. She might have been brought up with a family of Golliwogs. She didn't, like Ann, try not to see the Golli-

wog, but, with a perfectly expressionless face—though evidently, as Hilda saw, with the intention of pleasing the master—gave it an almost motherly care. When, in passing, Caroline stopped to straighten the black, smiling figure on the chair, Hilda nearly choked. She got through the meal without an explosion; though later, when Caroline came into the drawing-room with whisky and glasses, she nearly broke down.

“Please ‘m,” said Caroline, with decently folded hands, “do Master Golly sleep in the master’s room or have he a cot?”

“Oh, I’ll see about that, Caroline,” said Hilda through her teeth, in a wild murmur.

Henry saw that it was going to be a fight to a finish. In the security which came from a loyally dumb cook and a house-parlourmaid absolutely wanting in a sense of the ridiculous, Hilda gave loose rein to her imagination and began to embroider the joke. She affected to assume that Henry shared the affection she pretended for the Golliwog, and talked solemn nonsense about the “Place of the Golliwog in Well-ordered Homes.” At last, she said, the question of the Tertium Quid had been solved satisfactorily. She sketched out an advertisement for Mr. Gamage: “A relief to jealous husbands, a boon to the *femme incomprise*,

without fear of scandal. Always good-tempered, never *de trop*. Can be kept with equal propriety in the boudoir or the bedroom." Every evening, when Henry came home to dinner, she had some fresh development of the "Golliwog idea" to discuss with him, and by and by, to his alarm, Henry found that he was getting interested, and unconsciously thinking of little clever contributions to the idea on his own account. As he once unguardedly admitted, in a weakly conciliatory moment, the Golliwog was "such a cheerful little beast."

It ceased to be an active annoyance, but instead became a measure of all he was losing. For, with a heartless depravity, of which he could not have believed her capable, Hilda rehearsed upon the Golliwog in his presence all the adorable fondness which had been his due—the curdling tones of the voice, the caressing movements of the hand—until the poor fool writhed in his chair with the sense of deprivation. Short of actually kissing the brute, she ran through the whole range of her witcheries.

Henry had the meagre satisfaction of knowing that his absurd punishment was kept from his neighbours. Nevinson, so far as he knew, had been professionally discreet, and he could

not help admiring the diabolical ingenuity with which Hilda got rid of the Golliwog, if anybody came in. But he was always in dread that she would be tempted to play to a wider audience. One evening she said reflectively—

“His morals are perfect, and his education in manners is so complete that he never makes a *faux pas*; but, don’t you think, perhaps, the *spiritual* side of his nature——? I was thinking this afternoon,” she went on, with a sanctimonious drawl, “when our dear vicar called——”

Henry turned pale.

“Hilda,” he said hoarsely, “if you show that thing to the vicar—or anybody—I’ll leave you. I swear I will. You’ve got to choose between——”

“Yes? Between you and the Golliwog?” she murmured, as he stopped in confusion.

“Damn it all! yes, if you like,” he said recklessly, “between me and the Golliwog.”

“I was afraid it would come to that,” said Hilda, with a sigh. “You’re such a jealous husband. But, Henry, I don’t think even a British jury would give you your freedom on account of a Golliwog.”

“Oh, for heaven’s sake let it drop!” he cried. “I’ve had enough of it. I’ll admit I was a fool about young Layland.”

"You were," she agreed.

"'Pon my soul!" he said miserably, "I wish he'd come back."

"Well," said Hilda judicially, "I must say he was better company than you've been for the last ten days. But I don't think he'll come back," she added, with a meaning smile; "he's much too happy where he is."

"What do you mean?" said Henry.

She took a letter from her pocket, and sat on the arm of his chair as he read—

"DEAR MRS. GARLAND,—It's all right, and I owe it all to you. We are to be married the week before I sail. Violet—"

"Who's Violet?" said Henry.

"She was one of my pupils," said Hilda, gently repulsing his eager arm. "She isn't good enough for him, but she's rather a sweet girl. They've been engaged for months, but she funked going out to Ceylon with him, and wanted to wait. However, I seem to have persuaded her that being married was—well, was worth some risks—although, of course, if I'd known" (she affected a whine) "how horrid husbands could be—"

"Oh, Hilda, what a beast I've been," said Henry penitently. She caught his head up

to her breast with the crook of her arm, and gave him the first kiss he'd had for ten days.

"Aw, did 'ums!" she said. "Well, you'll know better another time."

V

THE OTHER BELLINGHAM

THERE is no reason why I should not say at once that I never liked Mrs. Bellingham. I did not actively dislike her, however, and I suppose the real truth is that, Bellingham left out, we should have managed to get on pretty well. In marrying him she did not marry his friends, and of these I was the oldest. The situation, then, was not uncommon, but I am so far from flattering myself that the whole difficulty was her jealousy of me, that I am quite prepared to admit that I was jealous of her, and, moreover, when I remember what Bellingham ought to have done, I maintain that my jealousy was if not praiseworthy at any rate reasonable. The sequel will show that it was not in any narrow, personal sense that I was jealous. After Bellingham's marriage I still continued to go to his house, but I always felt that the liberty to invite me was a concession for which he paid in some way that did not

come to the surface. It was rather a relief to me, therefore, when they moved to Cornwall. At that distance from London my not going to see them required no embarrassing explanation.

To put my grievance against Mrs. Bellingham into a form easily understood, I will content myself with saying that after his marriage Bellingham did not paint so well as he painted before. Most people, not the public only, but the critics, say that he painted better. Nearly every one, in fact, asserts that his wife made him. Without pretending to a knowledge that I don't possess, I am quite willing to admit that within the limits determined by his marriage his technique improved wonderfully. Apparently he found himself. I explain this fact to myself by saying—and it shows the immense regard I had for his talent and versatility—that what Bellingham found was the only self that Mrs. Bellingham could understand. There was, I maintain, another and a finer Bellingham who, though he ceased to develop, did not, as I was afterwards to learn, die with his marriage.

When the Bellingham that everybody knew, the popular A.R.A., died after a short illness, I went down to the funeral. Mrs. Bellingham, who was a tall, fair woman of a type (to me slightly repellent) that most people agree to

call handsome, behaved admirably. She was simple and dignified, mournful but composed, as befitted the widow of a man universally respected and beginning to be celebrated. She had one child, a little boy of ten. Financially, unless the winding up of Bellingham's affairs revealed the unexpected, they were all right. Archer, who was his lawyer, said that they were all right. I observed that Archer, whom I then met for the first time, was of all Mrs. Bellingham's many admirers the most ardent and the most respectful.

Apart from the sadness of the occasion, Bellingham's funeral was chiefly interesting to me because it showed, in a new and attractive light, a class of people I had been taught to regard as careless with respect to the graver emergencies. To the little, windy churchyard by the sea came a dozen or so painters. In silk hats and frock-coats they took on an exaggerated dignity by contrast with what I supposed to be their ordinary appearance. Somehow they seemed to give me a greater effect of masculinity than do the men of stations more defined. They were more explicitly men than any men I have ever met except, perhaps, sailors. Less conventional in their grief than most mourners—they talked about quite irrelevant subjects on their way from the church

to the grave—they still conveyed the impression that they cared more. After the funeral I was invited to take tea with them and, while they preserved a professional reticence before the stranger they so hospitably entertained, I gathered that what they most admired in Bellingham was not his success, and that they did not like Archer who had driven home with the widow.

Though there had once been a vague understanding that if anything happened to Bellingham I was to give an eye to the settlement of his affairs, I had come to look upon this obligation as one that marriage annulled. I was a little astonished, therefore, when, on my return to the house to take leave of Mrs. Bellingham, she asked me to accompany Mr. Archer to Bellingham's studio and go through his papers. With the remark that it had been her husband's wish that I should do so, she gave me the key of his desk, rather ostentatiously, I thought, as if to assure me that she had no intention of interfering. I should explain that Bellingham's studio, being attached to his house which he had lately built, was more comfortable and more elaborately furnished than those of most of his colleagues who generally worked in converted net-lofts. As we went into the place, it occurred to me—I'll admit I

was on the look-out for the impression—that it had the appearance as if Bellingham had spent more time there than his work required, that he had accumulated there the things he specially cared for, that it was, in fact, a sort of refuge from his domestic life.

Archer soon found the papers that particularly concerned him as Bellingham's man of business, and as the remainder seemed to be of little importance, I, not sorry to show that Mrs. Bellingham's manner was gratuitous, asked him to wait while I looked through them. I was beginning to wonder why Bellingham had wished me to take this trouble when I came upon twenty letters put aside in a drawer, all addressed in the same hand, apparently a woman's. I must have looked disconcerted, for Archer said drily—

“You seem surprised!”

Already regretting that I had asked him to stop, I murmured something about its being, of course, all right, and he said—

“That, I suppose, is what you've got to find out.”

I disliked his tone, and said rather sharply—

“You don't think there was anything there shouldn't have been?”

He did not answer immediately. I am not uncharitable, but I could not help seeing that

the discovery had pleased him. Irritated, I repeated my question in plainer language. He answered it plainly and with a curious vehemence, as if he had long waited the opportunity to speak out.

“With due respect to the dead, Bellingham was only human. I am not at liberty to repeat confidences, but Mrs. Bellingham has had a good deal to put up with.”

“Well, anyhow,” I said, putting the letters together, “it’s none of our business.”

He shrugged his shoulders, with the remark that Mrs. Bellingham would probably be able to tell me all about it.

“I don’t intend to consult her,” I said.

“Why not?”

“If it was kept from her then it must be kept from her now. She is the person to be considered. She must be spared.”

I suppose my tone sounded ironical, for Archer glanced at me quickly and said—

“What do you propose to do then?”

“The simplest way will be to burn the letters at once.”

But Archer demurred.

“You must use your own discretion, of course,” he said, “but I don’t think you will be carrying out Bellingham’s wishes if you burn the letters without reading at least some of

them. There's a practical reason that you don't seem to have thought of. In affairs of this sort there are frequently claims, real or imaginary, to be settled."

He spoke like a lawyer, but I recognised that there was justice in what he said. It might have been exactly to prevent complications and to join up loose ends that Bellingham had wished me to look through his papers and, since further examination of the contents of his desk revealed nothing that could not properly be left to Archer, I came to the conclusion that the letters which I had placed in my pocket had been the special objects of his concern.

The feeling that in spite of my assurances to Archer I was going to be startled made me put off examining the letters until I got home. It was night when I did so, and startled I was, but not in the way that I had feared and Archer, I could not help believing, hoped. All the letters bore the same postmark, that of the village in Herefordshire where Bellingham had spent his youth. The earliest was dated some three years after his marriage, the latest a month before he died. I had intended to read only so many of the letters—they were from a Miss Crockford, whose name I had never heard—as would give me a clear understanding

of the relations between Bellingham and their writer, but I found them so fascinating that I read them all without scruple. Affectionate they were, but so innocent of anything that might have seemed to flatter Archer's perspicacity that, but for a difference, they might have been written by Bellingham's mother. They were the witty commentary of a woman, not young, I guessed, upon all that went on in her small and outwardly uneventful world. They were, however, interesting to me chiefly because they confirmed my notions of a Bellingham unappreciated by the majority of his acquaintances. More than that, they piqued me by suggesting a Bellingham that I had missed but recognised clearly, now that he was revealed to me by a subtler sympathy than my own. Over and over again the letters twitted him with his youth. Bellingham was turned forty when he died, and most people would have called him old for his years. Throughout the letters there was no reference to his wife, though there were several to his little boy.

I wrote to Miss Crockford, explaining how the letters had come into my hands and asking for instructions. In reply came a prim little note. The writer had, of course, seen the death announced in the *Morning Post*. She had heard of me, years ago, had wished to

make my acquaintance: was it too late now? She was ashamed to put me to so much trouble, but if I would be so good as to bring her the letters she would be unspeakably grateful. There were, she said—of course in a postscript—matters that ought to be explained.

Mere curiosity would have made me agree to her request, and I wrote at once to fix a date for my visit. Beyond Swindon I travelled by a new section of line which had the effect for me of intensifying the old-world character of the country through which it passed. The embankment was yet raw, the viaduct spanning the valley as we approached my destination, vividly new. The charm of the season, early September, lay upon the richly-wooded country in a mellow light, as if Nature had given up the effort to surprise with fresh beauties and were content for better or worse to be taken as she was. From the station, equipped with brand-new automatic machines for the sale of sweets and cigarettes, and attended by porters still proud of their uniforms, it was necessary for me to take a fly.

Whitcombe I found to be a village composed chiefly of the sort of houses that used to be called gentleman's residences: built in the classical style, stucco-fronted with urns and balustrades, mellowed with time, standing in

walled gardens which faced upon a wide common with noble wych-elms and an ugly Georgian church. On the far side of the common were a few cottages, decently withdrawn, their occupants only existing, one felt, to be an object lesson to the children of their betters in the humbler virtues, and to give a benevolent occupation to the ladies.

Miss Crockford lived in a small creeper-covered house next to the Quakers' Chapel. A comely, ruddy maid, who ought to have curtsied, and who I afterwards learned really was called Phœbe, admitted me. I observed in passing that the little, flagged hall was filled with the properties of sport and war: weapons from the East, an otter, a badger, a huge pike "caught by Mr. Warburton," a "double-barrelled fowling-piece taken from a poacher in Paynter's Copse," man-traps, and a spring gun.

Phœbe took me into a white-panelled sitting-room, furnished with Sheraton and smelling of pot-pourri. Upon the old Broadwood grand piano there was an open volume of Mozart's sonatas. I was immediately struck by the odd mingling of old and new in the contents of the glazed bookcase where, side by side with brown volumes of sermons, the works of Dr. Johnson and early editions of Sir Walter

Scott, were the newest and most talked-about examples of modern fiction. Bartolozzi mezzotints in black oval frames hung upon the white walls, together with certain early drawings of Bellingham's that poignantly illustrated for me a talent which, whatever may be the verdict of time upon his later works, was not the talent that made him famous.

I was looking at Bellingham's drawings when Miss Crockford came into the room. I suppose my face reflected what I felt about my friend's comparative failure, for she stopped suddenly and for a moment was literally unable to speak. Then she came forward and with slightly flushed concern asked about Mrs. Bellingham. I am sure that it cost her an effort to do so; that she spoke from charity and not from any personal interest in the widow. She must have been nearly ten years older than Bellingham: she was slender and fair and brown-faced, as if she had led an active life out of doors. I have met with too many disconcerting differences of opinion about looks to assert that she was beautiful, and I will merely say that I thought her beautiful. She was dressed in black, but not ostentatiously in mourning, and looked as if she had just then come in from a long country walk.

"I generally take tea in the garden these

fine days," she said, "unless you would prefer——"

I assured her that I had a special weakness for tea out of doors, and we went through the house and down some steps to a little lawn surrounded by borders warmed with those earlier flowers of autumn that keep at once the character of maturity and of decay: dahlias, phloxes, and the smaller sunflowers. A heavy cedar, gently moving in the light wind, shed a grave odour about the garden. In that atmosphere, and evoked by our silence, my dead friend was very present. Somehow this place, separated only by a high wall from the little yard of the Friends' Meeting House, seemed more true to his memory than the bright, windy town by the sea where he had come to his fame and spent the last of his days. It seemed to recall a deeper personality overlooked by all the world except ourselves.

I suppose we were both afraid of our subject, though in any case her conception of good manners and the duties of hospitality would have kept her from referring to the reason of my visit till the last possible moment. It was quite obvious that her manners though unobtrusive were the subject of deliberate art. She had even little obsolete conventions in speaking, as when she said "what gentlemen

like" in reference to something on the table; the words and the notion suggesting that she belonged to a period when ladies were taught an exaggerated respect for male dignity and male appetites. Possibly as a result of her finished formality, I have never felt so at ease with any woman in my life. I might have been an old friend who had dropped in to tea. That we were old friends, indeed, was beautifully implied in the fact that I was a friend of Bellingham's, but I felt that we met so on our own merits; that what made us both friends of Bellingham's would, if he had never lived—it is an immense compliment to myself—have made us friends of each other. We talked of many things with a gaiety in which our sadness was understood until, finally, seeing no other way, I drew the letters from my pocket.

She made a feeble movement as if to put them away, and her fine eyes grew misty.

"They are really of no consequence," she said, "and I might have asked you to burn them except that I wanted, I wanted——"

"Mayn't we talk about them?" I gently asked her.

She nodded, her eyes full of tears. She quickly dried them, however, and said, with quiet gravity—

"I want you to understand that he never at any time cared for me as he cared for his wife. I saw that at the very beginning; I was never, *never* under any illusion whatever, and I was quite content."

I told her that I had read the letters, and, so far as I could without impertinence, conveyed to her my sense of the value her friendship must have been to Bellingham. If I unconsciously betrayed my private opinion that she under-estimated his regard for her, I am not sorry. Certainly she did not look offended.

"Of course," she said, "it would be useless for me to pretend that we did not—that, after his marriage, our friendship was not in a sense clandestine. As a rule I think anything of that sort is abominable. For us, it had to be that, or—nothing at all. Believe me, I weighed it very carefully, oh, so carefully: you'll not think me profane when I say that I prayed for guidance before I let him write, before I wrote. And I still think," she raised her head and her small hands tightened upon the letters, "that under the circumstances we were justified."

Her almost prim conventionality made me wonder exactly why it had been necessary to conceal her friendship with Bellingham from

his wife, and I hinted something to that effect. She coloured deeply and said—

“It seems ridiculous, but she was jealous of me! Of me!” she repeated without a trace of affectation.

“Ah, I have known a woman be jealous of her husband’s mother!” I said with the highest intentions, but one of those egregious lapses in expression that years later turn one hot in the night to remember.

“That is different,” she said without wincing, and in a matter-of-fact tone, “because a man generally loves his mother. Please don’t think that I want to abuse Mrs. Bellingham, but—oh!” she cried with sudden passion—“she had so much, she had everything! She had his love, she was his wife, she bore his child. She might have left me just what he was able and willing to give.”

I had no great opinion of Mrs. Bellingham’s intelligence, but I reflected that after all sheer instinct must have warned her that it was just the pick of Bellingham that she never came within sight of and so her jealousy was not unnatural. The fact that it was only through the other woman that she became aware of the finer Bellingham, and that for herself she rather despised the finer Bellingham, would not lessen it. I did not think it ad-

visible to say so, however, and she went on

"He met her in Munich, as you know, and wrote—I have his letter—in a rapture of enthusiasm. She was his ideal woman. I congratulated him with all my heart: I never doubted that it was the best thing that could have happened to him. Not for a long time. He brought her to see me. Men will do things like that," she said, with gentle scorn—and I understood that it was not his obtuseness with regard to Mrs. Bellingham that she smiled at, for she was simply incapable of seeing what that lady had against her, but his insensibility with regard to herself. "I admired her tremendously," she continued, "but I saw at once that she was not going to like me, and I wondered why. He was puzzled too, and disappointed that we did not hit it off, as they say. We did not quarrel, she was perfectly civil to me, but there it was. Then for a long time I heard nothing of him at all. I wrote three times, but he did not answer my letters. I was hurt and angry, and I did not write again. Some time after his boy was born I was surprised to hear from him. He did not explain very clearly, but I gathered that she had objected to my letters. He had promised not to write to me, but lately he had begun to

feel that he could not keep his promise. There was nobody that understood him—in some little ways—so well as I did. So he asked me to write, and I consented. For eight years"—her face was momentarily twisted with grief—"his letters have been the joy of my life. Do you blame us?"

Perhaps I betrayed more feeling, a keener sense of Bellingham's failure than I should have done. I intimated that in my opinion they had erred only by moderation, that Bellingham had been too tamely acquiescent. She drew in and looked frightened.

"Oh, but you must understand that there was never any question of that," she said, clasping her hands. "We were always the best of friends, and I think I understood him better than—than most people. But, as I said, I was never, *never* under any illusion as to the sort of affection he had for me. If I had not been so sure, if he had ever shown—" She did not finish the sentence, but blushed vividly.

"It was that," she said, after a pause, "that made me feel she was unreasonable. It was so little we wanted: just the liberty to talk about the things we both cared for, his work, books, the places he had seen abroad. As he would write to another

man," she added, with extraordinary self-deception.

Her reference to his work gave me an opening I had wanted. I asked her whether she thought that he had, in the conventional phrase, fulfilled his promise.

"Oh," she said, "he became a very great painter. Everybody said so. I have heaps of newspaper references to his work. Surely he would not have been made an Associate of the Royal Academy if he were not a great painter."

She ran off the sentences glibly with clasped hands and her eyes fixed on mine, daring me to smile or protest, but I was not going to have it.

"Yes, but wasn't there," I persisted, with a glance at the drawings on the walls, "something in Bellingham, once, as you knew him and I knew him, something that didn't come out, something that under—different—circumstances might have come out, something that was worth—"

She stopped me with a look of positive terror.

"No, no, you mustn't say that. No man could have had happier circumstances. If I have made you think that I suppose he was in any way hindered I shall be most grieved.

He had every encouragement, every help : from the beginning her fortune enabled him to hold on as he might not have been able to otherwise, and she protected him from worry. He owed his success to her."

That, in a strict sense, was true, and I saw that whether from fear or scruple she would not allow herself even to imagine any other possible and better kind of success for him. She began to talk about his boy.

"What is he like? I have not seen him, but Godfrey"—in her agitated recoil the name slipped out—"sent me his photograph when he was five years old. A sweet little fellow."

I described the child as best I could. She listened with close attention, asking questions about his education and character. She was very anxious to know whether he seemed to have inherited his father's talent, and her remarks were so pointed and practical that I caught myself wondering if her interest in the child could be explained altogether by sentiment.

Later, I encouraged her to talk about herself. She was, she said with obvious pride, a soldier's daughter. On her father's death, when she was a baby, the family seat in another part of the county had passed to a distant relative, and her mother had retired to Whitcombe, keeping

up the traditions of a gentle and honourable house on a small income. The weapons and sporting trophies in the tiny hall, the furniture, even the volume of Mozart on the piano helped me to reconstruct the narrow, dignified life, based upon memories of the past, taking but little colour from the changes of time, which the mother and daughter must have lived in this village even to-day bearing the character of a slightly protesting gentility. With the exception of three years at a "finishing-school" in Clifton, Miss Crockford had never spent a day apart from her mother, who died six years ago, leaving her to an even closer seclusion. She must have been nearly thirty when she first met Bellingham—then a youth of twenty—and it was not difficult to picture her fluttered, late awakening. Bellingham, keen, cultivated, full of the latest theories about art and life, had been, I could see, half amused but wholly charmed with the effect of new ideas upon her unsophisticated though quick intelligence. Only later he had come to know her immeasurable superiority to the woman he had married.

"Oh, he taught me everything!" she said, with a foolish laugh. "He showed me a new world. I had been to Rome and to Paris with my mother, I knew what I liked, but it was

all meaningless to me until he opened my eyes. The arguments we had! Sometimes my mother was on his side, sometimes on mine. She hated everything new, but she liked him so much and he talked so well that she quite looked forward to his visits, and I was often positively startled to find how—against her knowledge and will—‘up-to-date’ she was getting.”

Before I left her, with some little embarrassment she asked me whether, as I had decided to stop the night at the inn, I would meet her lawyer in the morning. She had always intended, if Bellingham had found a difficulty, as so many artists do—but then, of course, he hadn’t. But there was the boy. She had no relations that were not much better off than herself. Her money, it was not a great sum, was in Government Stock. Didn’t I think that to a young man just beginning his career a small, certain annuity might make all the difference? But she didn’t want Mrs. Bellingham to know. By the time the boy was of age, any resentment that Mrs. Bellingham might feel against her would be dead. “And, besides,” she added, with a sad little laugh that had yet some eagerness of hope in it, “I may be dead too.”

I did not see Mrs. Bellingham again, and

I did not think it necessary to tell Archer anything more about the letters. Now that Mrs. Bellingham is Mrs. Archer, I am quite sure that I was justified and well-advised in keeping silence.

VI

ELSIE RAEBURN

WE were sitting in the stalls of a North London theatre. The curtain had just gone down on the second act of a domestic drama, and the musicians took up their parable with a fine air of detachment. They played the *Entr'acte* from Schubert's *Rosamunde*. The naive, serious melody, with its wistful comment on the problems of life, was, in their hands and after the tawdry emotion of the piece, like a breath of meadow-sweet in a bar parlour. Manners turned to me impulsively, saying in a harsh whisper, "Come out and get a little fresh air." I suppose I looked unwilling to move, for Manners, rising, said, "All right; I'm going, anyhow." I followed him, brushing past the knees of women whose faces at that moment depressed one's ideas of the whole sex, and as Manners turned his head to the orchestra, I saw that his features were twitching with emotion. The softly closing swing-doors

muffled the music, and Manners was himself again.

We turned down the vestibule and stood looking out into the street. It had been raining, and the wet pavement gave back bizarre effects of colour like a broken puzzle. Every now and again an electric car came humming by; the trolley took a new section of wire with a kissing sound and a violet spark at the insulators. Manners lit a cigarette, threw it away, and began to talk platitudes about the people standing in the vestibule. I supposed that either the play or somebody in the theatre had affected him disagreeably, and made no comment on his curious behaviour. We lingered until the repeated clapping of doors told us that people were hurrying to their places.

"Do you want any more of that?" said Manners hesitatingly, with a jerk of his head in the direction of the stalls. Seeing his obvious unwillingness to return, I suggested that we had already done our duty by the play. He looked relieved.

"All right," he said. "We'll go home."

"Home" meant Manners' flat in Lawton Road. I was up from the country, and his guest for three days, and we had gone to the theatre that night from a mistaken sense of

duty because everybody was talking about the piece. When we were seated in his room, Manners apologised for spoiling my evening. He made several attempts to begin a conversation, but finally gave up the effort with a nervous laugh.

"The last time I heard the *Entr'acte*," he said, "it was played by the girl I ought to have married."

"'Ought to have married' suggests that you were saved from a great mistake," I observed.

"Do you think so?" asked Manners eagerly. "I'd give ten years of my life to be sure of the truth of that."

"When in doubt, don't," I quoted; adding suggestively, "Of course, I haven't heard any details yet."

By the time Manners had finished his story I was less able to give him the assurance he craved.

Manners was a consulting engineer. When I first knew him he was about thirty years of age, fairly prosperous and decidedly good-looking. He was tall and fair; his manners had the attractive self-reliance which comes of a training at once intellectual and practical. His offices were in Victoria Street, and at that time he lived in Cardigan Square, off the Earl's

Court Road. I give the story in his own words :—

“ I dare say you’ve noticed that when your business takes you along the same route every day, often by the same conveyance, you gradually sort out the constant from the casual among your fellow-passengers, and establish an acquaintance more or less friendly according to your temperament. During the two years I lived in Cardigan Square and travelled by the Brompton ‘bus, I never got farther than a nod to this one, a ‘Good-morning’ to the other, except in the case of Elsie Raeburn. She was about sixteen, I should say. There is a convenient slang term for girls of this age—‘ Flapper.’ You meet them in shoals along the Cromwell Road—Art Students, Royal Academy pupils, High School girls, all sorts of girls ; crude girl in the lump—to me the least interesting kind of girl. I like kids, I like grown girls, but I never did like flappers. They giggle ; they’re too big to play with, too young to talk to. However, Elsie Raeburn was different. It was a little odd, you see, to meet a flapper on a Brompton ‘bus going East at nine o’clock in the morning. Most of the girls who do things in town put up their hair at an earlier age. I took the ‘bus at the Kensington Museum, and Elsie used to come out of one of

the short, quiet streets by the station. I can't describe Elsie; she was dark and pale, with honest grey eyes, athletic in figure and not in the least gawky. She used to get off at the Circus and disappear eastwards. I think she noticed very soon that I was interested in her. She used to pass me with that curious ducking of the head which accompanies self-consciousness in girls of her age. She made you think of the dove and the serpent. It was quite obvious that she had been warned of dangers to girls in the London streets, and also that she had no idea what those dangers might be. This gave her an air of watchful confidence such as you see in some birds—willing to be approached but always ready to dart off on a hint of over-familiarity. Occasionally her great grey eyes met mine in frank comradeship, and I think she rebelled a little against the convention which forbade her to speak to me. She was very observant, with a keen sense of humour; and so many things happen during a 'bus ride through Piccadilly that really ought to be talked about. I got into the way of taking things at second-hand from the expressions on Elsie's face; joy in the weather, amusement at novel sandwich-men, pity for fallen cab-horses. However, Elsie never spoke; and I was afraid to spoil our silent

confidences by making first move. My opportunity came with a little accident.

"One greasy November afternoon when we pulled up to the kerb in the Circus, the conductor, for once, was neither in his proper place nor temper. Just as we moved on I heard a shout, and, looking down, saw my little friend lying in the mud. I got off the 'bus and ran to her help. A policeman had picked her up, and she stood dazed and trembling, trying hard not to cry. A little sympathetic crowd was dissolving when I reached her, and the policeman, glad of my appearance, suggested a chemist's shop. Elsie smiled at me ruefully, and mopped her swollen lip with her handkerchief.

"'Let me get you a cab?' I said.

"She shook her head. 'Oh, please, please don't,' she answered in great alarm.

"'But you can't walk home like that,' I protested.

"While we were arguing, the policeman, with great good sense, had called a cab. Elsie's nerves were so upset that I was afraid to let her go alone. I am sure it was the first time she had ridden in a hansom, and it was pretty to watch her frank enjoyment of the experience. It was as if she were playing some game of make-believe; she settled herself with a little air of dignity deliciously

funny. Her face was so expressive that one could follow all her thoughts. She was not sure of the fare ; she tried, without letting me see, to calculate it from the table in the cab. She evidently did not intend to allow me to pay. But had she enough money ? I looked the other way whilst she fumbled in her pocket. When I turned round I saw by her deepened colour and miserable eyes that her immediate resources were below the sum she supposed necessary. When we got out at the door of No. 17 Howard Place, she did not protest while I paid the man, but when I was about to ring the bell and bid her good-bye, she said nervously—

“ ‘ Oh, but please won’t you come in and see my mother ? ’

“ Though I was anxious to improve our acquaintance, it happened that I had an engagement that evening at an hour which left me very little time to get to my rooms and dress. I tried to excuse myself, but Elsie’s face fell.

“ ‘ But I cannot allow you to pay my cab fares,’ she said. I tried not to smile at the plural.

“ ‘ Very well,’ I said. ‘ If that is worrying you, you can surely pay me when we see each other again.’

"Still she hesitated, murmuring—

"'But I would rather you came in.'

"I understood, suddenly, that she did not like the idea that I should bring her home in a cab without seeing her mother. I felt very masculine and inferior. Elsie took me up to the first floor.

"'Mother,' she cried, forgetful of her damaged appearance, 'this is— Oh, I don't know your name.'

"I had my card ready and took over the explanation.

"'My name is Godfrey Manners,' I said. "I happened to see a slight accident to your daughter, and since she seemed rather shaken I took the liberty of bringing her home.'

"On our entrance Mrs. Raeburn had come forward with a little cry of alarm. Whilst I was speaking her expression underwent a curious change. She realised in a moment that Elsie was not seriously hurt, but eyed me up and down with a new anxiety. She was a ladylike woman, with fair, curly hair and prominent, light blue eyes. It struck me at once that she was not reliable. She had the trick, common to fair people who cannot lie with perfect self-possession, of opening her eyes very wide to give the impression of truth.

“‘Why, mother, what have you been doing?’ cried Elsie, going towards the table, which was littered with papers.

“‘Only accounts, dear,’ said Mrs. Raeburn calmly, as she collected the papers and pushed them into a drawer. I just had time to notice the sketch-plan of a room on one of the papers. It occurred to me that, owing to the swiftness of our cab, Elsie had come home earlier than she was expected.

“Mrs. Raeburn thanked me for taking care of her daughter, now afflicted with shyness, and pressed me to stay for a cup of tea. She looked relieved when I pleaded my evening’s engagement. Somehow the visit left an unpleasant memory as I went away from the door. Mrs. Raeburn obviously was not quite straightforward.

“It was three mornings later when I again met Elsie on the Brompton ‘bus. She greeted me with a charming smile, and held out her hand, saying, ‘My mother will be so pleased if you will come to tea on Sunday. Do come,’ she added impulsively, on her own account. I said I should be delighted, and, the ice being broken, we talked gaily over our common experiences of the last three months.

“‘I’m so glad I fell in the mud,’ said Elsie,

as we parted. 'It was stupid before, wasn't it?—not being able to talk, I mean.'

"On succeeding days she talked about herself with pretty pride.

"'Do you know I earn a pound a week, and I am only sixteen?'

"I was a little startled, and felt a vague misgiving.

"'Yes?' I said.

"'I'm a confidential clerk,' she said, with an air of importance. 'I have an office all to myself.'

"'What's the name of your firm?' I asked her.

"'It isn't a firm; there's only Mr. Tomlinson—and Selby, the other clerk.'

"'And you do the typewriting?' I suggested.

"'No; I have to copy out the histories of people from notes Mr. Tomlinson gives me. Mr. Tomlinson does a great deal for poor people—particularly people who have been to prison. He's a solicitor, really, but he's a, what d'you call it?—a philanthropist, in his spare time. He says that criminals are his hobby.'

"'And do you copy out histories all day?'

"'No; very often there are no histories to be done. Then I have to copy out of books—

a chapter of Gibbon, or Ruskin, or Herbert Spencer—to improve my mind, Mr. Tomlinson says.'

"The situation did not quite explain itself, and I determined to make further inquiries about Mr. Tomlinson. My visit on Sunday was entirely a pleasure. Mrs. Raeburn was an intelligent woman and a good talker. She seemed to have travelled a great deal, on the Continent and in America. She gave lessons in china-painting at her pupils' own homes, and was also—more profitably, I suspected—a specialist in lace. She knew everything there was to be known about lace, ancient or modern. It is probable that she made a nice little income by valuing, buying, and selling lace on commission. She was in touch with the societies for encouraging the manufacture of lace; her sound knowledge and pleasant manners gave her access to the best houses, and she had quite a large circle of aristocratic acquaintances. Elsie was adorable. After tea she played to me, and though she was not in any sense a musician, her freedom from affectation made her playing a delight. Amongst other things she played the *Entr'acte* we heard this evening, and I have ever since associated the piece with her. Until a year before I met her she

had been at a school in Surrey, where she had apparently received the usual futile education of girls. I felt my way delicately to a discussion of Mr. Tomlinson. I did not wish to alarm Mrs. Raeburn, but I wanted to assure myself that she had a clear idea of her daughter's circumstances. Mrs. Raeburn's account of Mr. Tomlinson was entirely satisfactory. He was a friend of her husband, who died when Elsie was a child of ten. When Elsie left school, Mrs. Raeburn asked the old gentleman to help her in finding some light occupation for her daughter, and he very kindly offered to take her into his own office. From her description, Mr. Tomlinson was an eccentric old solicitor with a small practice and mildly philanthropic tendencies. One of his hobbies was an Employment Agency for outcasts of all sorts.

"I failed to see what use he could find for long extracts from Gibbon and Herbert Spencer, but supposed him sufficiently well off to disregard economy in the salaries he gave his clerks.

"Our acquaintance continued happily. My visit to Howard Place was the first of many, until it became quite a regular thing for me to take tea there on a Sunday afternoon. I think Mrs. Raeburn was glad to know that Elsie

was under a certain amount of protection on her journeys. I believe that she encouraged her to look young from some obscure feminine instinct of safety. It was a pathetic idea that a sense of chivalry would cause the casual blackguard to spare a girl who often wore her hair down.

"With our growing intimacy I discovered the quaint corners of Elsie's nature. She had a private story for all the people who came and went regularly on our route—the argumentative old gentleman, the superb young clerk, the straw-coloured girl with the mandoline. She eluded all my attempts to find out whether she had honoured me with an imaginary history. I found that she lived in a world of unreality ; how unreal only the sequel showed.

"We played elaborate games. Sometimes we would race together with a great air of mystery. Then I would help her on to the 'bus in desperate haste as if we were pirates being chased to the security of our vessel. We never considered ourselves safe until we had weathered St. George's Place, and swung gallantly into the broad reach at Hyde Park Corner. There we clasped hands and breathed freely. One day Elsie produced a small black flag with the skull and cross-bones, and we had great sport displaying it for a moment behind the driver's

back, and pretending that cabs swerved aside in terror as we passed. We agreed to regard our conductor with suspicion as a traitor. We were the skipper and mate, and very soon came to 'Bill' and 'Jack.'

"On fine days we walked home together, and since Howard Place was very little out of my way, I was able to leave Elsie at her door. One day I was annoyed to see a well set-up, middle-aged man watching her from the corner of the road. I said nothing, but made a point of passing the man at close quarters ; he returned my glance with perfect composure.

"Meanwhile, I found an excuse for visiting Mr. Tomlinson's office in Nelson Street. I found him a weak-eyed, grey-bearded man of gentle manners. I learned from an acquaintance that he was quite well known in the police-courts as a natural curiosity ; a lawyer whose experiences of human nature had not hardened his heart. He was frequently commended by magistrates for his efforts on behalf of discharged prisoners. First offenders were always recommended to Mr. Tomlinson to put them in the way of earning an honest living. In time of strikes Mr. Tomlinson was often called upon to solve the difference between employer and employed.

"I noticed occasionally that Elsie looked

worried. At first when I questioned her, she put me off with a tale of headaches, but I had learnt her too well to be satisfied with this explanation. Under pressure, she admitted that she was troubled about her mother.

"'I wish she would give up the lace,' she said; 'it is an endless bother to her.'

"'But surely it pays her much better than the painting lessons,' I objected.

"'Yes,' Elsie admitted. 'But it is such a responsibility. You see, some of the commissions are very valuable, and there is the risk that the people at one end won't pay. Mother is in a perfect fever of anxiety for days together until she knows that it is all right. It takes it out of her; she is quite exhausted and ill after a big commission.'

"The statement sounded extravagant, but I had no reason to doubt Elsie's words.

"'My mother is overworking herself and won't take a holiday,' she continued. 'It gets worse and worse; she used only to work in the daytime, but now she has to go out in the evening as well, and I am left all alone.'

"Elsie's fit of depression did not last long. After a few days she told me that her mother had just received the money for a transaction which had worried her for some time, and that she talked about giving up the lace. It was a

keen, bright morning in January, and Elsie was in high spirits; we played pirates with renewed gusto. Just as we reached Hyde Park Corner, Elsie, with shivering glee, pulled out a small revolver from her jacket pocket.

“‘Good heavens, Jack!’ I cried; ‘where did you get that?’

“She chuckled mischievously.

“‘I found it in my mother’s room; she used to carry it when she was in America.’

“‘But, my dear girl, it is loaded,’ I said.

“Elsie put up her hands to her ears with a little scream.

“‘Oh, how dreadful!’ she cried. ‘I never dreamt it was loaded. Her eyes filled with tears. ‘And I might have let it off and killed you. I’m so glad you took it from me; please keep it until you come on Sunday. I shall be afraid to touch it again.’

“I slipped the weapon into my pocket without further remark, though I felt very much disturbed. When I was alone, I examined the revolver carefully, and felt convinced that it had never been to America. It bore the name of a London maker, was of modern pattern, and, from all appearances, recently loaded. I missed Elsie at the Circus that afternoon, and walked home alone. As I was passing the Oratory I saw the girl crossing the

road some distance ahead. I hurried after her. I had just reached the end of the street where she turned down, and was about to hail her by name, when a man—the same I had seen watching her on a previous occasion—stepped out of a doorway and spoke to her. Elsie evidently did not understand him, and hesitated. He stooped towards her and spoke earnestly. She turned with an indignant stamp of her foot, and was about to walk on, but the man laid his hand on her arm. This was enough for me.

“I ran forward, crying, ‘Run, Elsie, run !’ let drive, and caught him between the eyes. He went down like a bullock, but, in his fall, grabbed at the satchel Elsie carried in her hand. Elsie took to her heels and disappeared round the corner. The man bounded up from the pavement with singular agility.

“‘Oh, you fool !’ he cried, and blew a police whistle. Almost immediately a constable appeared and laid hold of me. I tried to shake him off, but he held my arms firmly behind and murmured soothingly. The man whom I had knocked down leaned against the wall to recover his breath. He laughed shortly.

“‘Let him go,’ he said to the policeman, ‘or, wait a minute, what’s your name?’ I told him to go to the devil. He answered good-humouredly enough—

“‘Oh, all right. I’m Detective Inspector Glaive, of Scotland Yard. Take him to the station, constable.’

“I was now convinced that I had been hasty. I explained my identity, adding, ‘I suppose I made a mistake.’

“‘Confound you!’ laughed the other. ‘Of course you did. All right, constable—call a cab and go to No. 17.’

“When the policeman had gone, the man turned to me, saying, ‘I was anxious to save Miss Raeburn from the pain of seeing her mother arrested.’

“I said something about a blunder. The inspector sighed wearily, and rubbed his forehead.

“‘Oh no,’ he said, ‘there’s no mistake. We’ve waited long enough, but we’ve got the evidence all cut and dried now. Well, since you’re a friend of Miss Raeburn’s, perhaps you’ll come along with me. So far as we know, the young lady isn’t implicated, and they’ve got Tomlinson. My colleague, Standerton, is at No. 17, looking after Mrs. Raeburn. You see, I wanted to get her quietly out of the way before her daughter came home. I should have arranged with the landlady to explain to Miss Raeburn that her mother had to stay away for the night on business, and send a decent woman round in

the morning to break it to the poor girl gently. However, you've spoilt it all—and my face.'

"When we reached the house, we found Mrs. Raeburn sitting bolt upright and very still, whilst Elsie clung to her, sobbing hysterically. Standerton, a little, clean-shaven man of clerical appearance, was looking profoundly miserable, and trying hard to efface himself, though his eyes were on the alert for any movement on the part of his prisoner. As we entered the room Elsie sprang up and ran to me.

"'Oh, Mr. Manners, please explain to this man that he has made a mistake,' she cried, seizing my hand.

"'No, Elsie, it is quite true,' said Mrs. Raeburn composedly. 'They have been too clever for me, that is all. But, you silly girl, why did you take my revolver? I got it on purpose for an emergency like this.' Then she turned to me.

"'Well, Mr. Manners, I don't know whether you hold the conventional views about property, but I'll ask you to believe that Elsie is not in my confidence regarding the details of—my profession.'

"I understood that in her impassive way she asked my protection for her daughter.

"'Elsie shall be taken care of,' I said.

"'Thank you,' said Mrs. Raeburn, without

emotion, though there was an almost savage appeal in her eyes that I should help her not to give way. She was indeed the only self-possessed person in the room. When we heard the cab drive up to the door, Glaive and Standerton looked at each other guiltily. Their manner towards Mrs. Raeburn, low-voiced and considerate, was that of two physicians in consultation over an interesting case.

“‘You’ll find my hat and jacket in the bedroom, Mr. Manners,’ said Mrs. Raeburn; ‘a grey felt hat and a jacket with a velvet collar.’ She took Elsie’s face between her hands and, kissing her on the forehead, pushed her gently away. Only at the door I heard her say with a groan, ‘You fools! do you think I am made of stone? Be quick!’

“I left Elsie in the care of Mrs. Priddle, the landlady, and that same evening I went down to Mitcham to talk to my aunt. The old lady proved as good as I believed her to be. She came back to town with me the next day and took Elsie at once to her heart.

“The trial was a famous one. For at least three years Mrs. Raeburn and Mr. Tomlinson had been associated in what may best be called a system of arm-chair burglary. Their methods were elaborately organised. Mr. Tomlinson’s philanthropic enterprises, his connection with

the police-courts, and his employment agency, gave him a wide and intimate knowledge of all sorts and conditions of criminals. He collected criminals as another man collects butterflies or postage-stamps ; indexed and described them with infinite pains. The modern burglar is usually an artist who displays more skill in the execution of his designs than ingenuity in their conception. Mr. Tomlinson supplied the brains. From his office in Nelson Street he controlled a series of brilliant affairs against property in London and the suburbs. Mrs. Raeburn was his intelligence officer. Her ostensible profession as a dealer in lace took her into the best houses, where she had unusual opportunities for studying the arrangement of rooms and the situation of valuable property. People were always ready to show their treasures to a woman of her sound taste and knowledge. Mrs. Raeburn was gifted with great powers of observation and an excellent memory ; she was clever at making plans and sketches. When Mr. Tomlinson's offices were searched, it was found that he had a set of portfolios filled with drawings of houses, carefully lettered, and furnished with useful details as to the fastenings of windows and the position of safes. The drawings were executed with the most scrupulous neatness ; some were dated,

and the dates were found to coincide with actual burglaries at the houses portrayed.

“Mr. Tomlinson sorted out his criminals with diligent care, put them in the way of a job—always the right man for the right job—and received a handsome proportion of the spoil as a commission. The men employed by him knew nothing of Mrs. Raeburn’s co-operation. They were supplied with type-written directions for their enterprises, and it was owing to one of these documents falling into the hands of the police, that Inspector Glaive began the investigation which culminated in the arrest of Mr. Tomlinson and Mrs. Raeburn. In several cases the burglars had actually been caught—which fact may explain Mrs. Raeburn’s periodical fits of anxiety—but they had never given information throwing suspicion upon Mr. Tomlinson. The reason was probably fear, since that gentleman was in touch with those who did not stick at the removal of informers. Indeed, Mr. Tomlinson narrowly escaped hanging; there only wanted final evidence to connect him with two murders. He received a life sentence. Mr. Selby, who, foreseeing disaster, had given valuable assistance to Inspector Glaive, was safeguarded out of the country.

“A very slight cross-examination established

Elsie's complete innocence. She bore the strain of the trial better than I had expected ; indeed, the poor girl seemed stupefied and only half-conscious of her surroundings. She gave her evidence with a childlike simplicity which reduced many of the spectators to tears. Indeed, more than once, the judge, with a choke in his voice, had to call the court to order. Mrs. Raeburn was sentenced to five years' penal servitude.

" Detective Inspector Glaive gained immense credit for his discovery of the means whereby Mrs. Raeburn and Mr. Tomlinson corresponded. With sound instinct he had never suspected Elsie of complicity, though he felt sure that she was an unconscious agent. He had noticed that she always carried a little satchel to and from the office. The contents were found to be a tin sandwich case and some fancy needlework. A careful examination of the sandwich case revealed an ingeniously constructed double bottom, in which the papers were hidden. Elsie was in the habit of hanging her satchel, together with her hat and jacket, on a peg in the outer passage. Whilst she was busy in the office, Mr. Tomlinson attended to his correspondence.

" Elsie lived with my aunt for three months. After the trial she was seriously ill, and it was during her convalescence, when I saw

her frequently, that I ought to have found out what my aunt afterwards made clear to me. One day Elsie disappeared. We were beside ourselves with anxiety, and searched for her everywhere. I called in the assistance of Mr. Glaive, but even he failed this time. My aunt has never forgiven me for what she called my cruel stupidity. She is convinced that Elsie ran away because she could no longer conceal the love I hesitated to return, and that the poor girl attributed my silence to the fact of her parentage. Two years ago my aunt received a letter bearing the post-mark of a North Country town. In it Elsie said that she was in a good situation and earning a comfortable salary. She implored us not to search for her, and for a time I respected her wish. Afterwards, when I found out that she was a necessity to my happiness, I determined to seek her out and ask her the question I should have asked before. But she was gone. The lady to whom she had acted as companion could give me no information beyond the fact that Elsie had given her notice with the reason that she now had a home to go to. As the date coincided with the expiration of Mrs. Raeburn's sentence, I think it is probable that they left the country together."

VII

YELLOW JASMINE

PERCY BUCKLE, qualified assistant to Mr. John Hermon, Chemist by Examination, had finished tidying-up after the day's dispensing, and was preparing to settle down to the *Pharmaceutical Journal*, when the door-bell clanged, and a woman gustily entered the shop. Into that chilly and decorous place she brought an atmosphere of warmth and vitality, and as Percy rose from his chair behind the counter, he thought of crimson roses and generous wine, and a band playing march music. The woman—not quite a lady, Percy decided—was tall and of ripe figure, with velvety dark eyes, red lips, and a full white throat; and if Percy had been quick at words he would have said that she moved gallantly. She gave the impression of bounding health and of youth passionately prolonged—for she must have been at least thirty—and Percy's observant eyes caught the gleam of gold-stopping in her white teeth, and,

though she was not obviously "made-up," he felt sure that the milky bloom of her complexion owed something to cosmetics. As she advanced to the counter, Percy's nose, by long use indifferent to the aromatic odours of the shop, detected a new and subtle perfume surrounding her like an envelope. He wished that he could cure himself of the weakness of blushing whenever he saw a handsome woman. Apparently she noticed his embarrassment, for her full lips were smiling as, with lowered eyes, she fumbled in her red Russia leather purse for a scrap of paper. Percy's own eyes fluttered and fell as she gave him a prescription over the counter, and he observed, in passing, her large, well-formed hand with manicured fingernails.

"Will you make that up at once, please?" she said impulsively.

Her voice was powerful and yet soft, as if warmed and enriched by passing through her splendid throat.

"Shall I send it for you, madam?" said Percy discreetly.

"No thanks — I'll wait. I'm suffering horribly."

From internal evidence Percy concluded that "Miss Pemberton's" prescription was for neuralgia, and, indeed, he noticed that her left

cheek glowed warmer than the other, and that, in spite of her smiling lips, her eyes were misty with pain. He wished that he could summon up courage to say, "Then you bear it very bravely." The idea of this glorious creature in pain afflicted him strangely, and he was turning away, when she said with a little confusion—

"By the way—that isn't my name; not now. Will you please alter it to Mrs. Woolright on the label?"

"A honeymoon wife," thought Percy. But for the fact that the prescription written for "Miss Pemberton" was dated only six months ago, he would have said that she was a widow recently remarried. He decided that in letting her go about alone Mr. Woolright was unappreciative, and did not deserve his good fortune.

Percy Buckle was not quite so self-possessed as usual when he went behind the screen of the dispensing department. The prescription involved rather delicate manipulation and the use of a mortar, and for once Percy bungled and had to begin over again. While he weighed and dissolved, he was conscious that he was listening to the woman as she rustled about the shop, humming to herself and tapping with her fingers on the glass cases.

Perhaps Mrs. Woolright noticed that the

grave, good-looking young man was disturbed by her proximity, for, after he had handed her the bottle and given her the change of a sovereign, she lingered for a moment.

"What sort of a place is this?" she asked in her curiously impulsive manner, and smiling at him.

"Oh, very select," stammered Percy.

She nodded, pursing up her mouth.

"Any amusements?"

Percy summed up the resources of the little West-country watering-place, and, encouraged by seeing Mr. Hermon peering round the door behind the dispensing department, he ventured to say—

"I don't think you'll be bored."

"Oh, I shan't be bored," she said, laughing frankly. "No, I shan't be bored. Well, good-morning," she added, with an amused and yet kindly glance at him.

As Percy returned from closing the door after her, Mr. Hermon stepped down into the shop.

"Damn fine woman, Buckle," he said, smacking his lips.

Mr. Hermon was a little, shrewd-faced, clean-shaven man, with a large bald head, and a manner that implied a wide and tolerant experience of human nature.

Percy reddened to his ears, but said nothing.

"Reserved for the nobility, eh, what?" said Mr. Hermon.

"Her name is Mrs. Woolright," said Percy, with a dignity that surprised himself.

"H'm!" said Mr. Hermon drily, and glancing at the open page of the prescription book. "Well," he added, turning away, "it's experience you want, Buckle—*savoir-faire*, as the French say. Talk to 'em, talk to 'em, my boy—but don't lose your head."

With a feeling that the shop seemed very cold and quiet after the lady's departure, Percy sat down behind the counter, but instead of reading the *Pharmaceutical Journal* he fell to day-dreaming. Being young and virtuous, his recent emotion led him naturally and quickly to thoughts about the future; about the full flower and development of his own life. He was ambitious and enthusiastic in the practice of his profession, and not merely with a view to material advancement. He took a keen imaginative pleasure in the study of drugs, and had already contributed articles on "The Alkaloids of Cinchona" and "A New Formula for Neutral Solutions of the Hypophosphites" over the signature "Hermes Trismegistus" to the *Journal* which now lay disregarded on his knee. Next year, with ordinary luck, he would

be able to write "Pharmaceutical Chemist" after his name; Mr. Hermon was only "Chemist by Examination." Percy lived "out" with his widowed mother, in her own cottage half a mile up the Combe, and he had accumulated quite a comfortable little sum in the Post Office Savings Bank. Simple and dignified in his life, he was not indifferent to social pleasures; he played a good game of chess, sang bass in the local Philharmonic Society, and belonged to the tennis club. Altogether, he was looked upon as a very promising young man.

From the laboratory behind the shop came Mr. Hermon's voice, singing in a nasal tenor—

"Tired, so tired, my dar-ling.
The day has been ve-ry long,
. . . It's ti-me for E-ven-song."

Percy was rather sorry for Mr. Hermon. He had quite a good business, it is true, but with middle-age he seemed to have lost interest and enterprise. For one thing, thought Percy, looking round the shelves, when he started in business for himself he would have a more systematic arrangement of bottles. Mr. Hermon was averse from change.

"It's all right for you, Buckle," he would say, when the young man suggested some alteration, "but when you get to my age you'll let well

alone. This may not seem very methodical, but I know it. If I'm knocked up in the night I can come down half-asleep and lay my hand on anything I want."

Percy's reverie had reached the consideration of the exact pattern of gold label he would have on his own bottles and drawers when, as the abbreviated Latin inscriptions formed themselves in his mind—

"Good God!"

He jumped up, upsetting his chair, and, after a hasty glance at the prescription book, ran round to the bench behind the screen. The mortar and measures were washed and put away, but Percy Buckle knew that for the first time in his career he had made a mistake in dispensing medicine. He dashed into the laboratory where Mr. Hermon, in shirt-sleeves and apron, surrounded by a spicy odour, with reddened fingers, was packing wet roots into a pear-shaped percolator.

"Now keep your head, Buckle, keep your head," said the chemist, looking up under his brows at the agitated young man. "What is it?"

Percy stammered a hardly coherent explanation.

"Ssh!—there's no need to frighten the missis," said Mr. Hermon. He led the way

into the shop and ran his finger down the prescription book.

“Butyl—Chloral—great Scott!” he said, looking up with a startled face.

“No, that’s all right, that’s all right—and I know that the doses were correct,” said Percy excitedly, “but I left out the Tincture of *Gelsemium*.”

Mr. Hermon closed the book with a bang.

“What shall I do?” said Percy distractedly.

“Noth-ing,” drawled Mr. Hermon quietly, and began to whistle.

“Oh, but—?”

“Now look here, Buckle,” said Mr. Hermon, in a cooing voice, and tapping the young man on the arm with his red-stained forefinger, “take it calmly. This prescription is six months old, and it was written God knows where, by God knows whom. Who’s to know you didn’t make it up properly? Not the patient, unless she’s devilish smart—and even then it would be easy to lie.”

“I shan’t be satisfied till I’ve put it right,” said Percy uneasily.

Mr. Hermon raised his eyebrows.

“You understand what it means, Buckle?” he said gravely. “If the lady turns up nasty—and she looked as if she had the devil of a temper, that sort always has—I, well, much as

I like you, Buckle, I can't afford to keep an assistant who makes mistakes. Whereas, if it remains between you and me and the Tinct. Gel-se-mi-um—well, I'm not infallible myself. See?"

Just for a moment Percy Buckle hesitated. He recognised the justice of Mr. Hermon's argument. The effect on the patient of his omission would be infinitesimal, but if he left his present employment in consequence of a blunder his own future would be gravely compromised.

"Come, come," said Mr. Hermon soothingly.

"It's no use—I must go and get it back," said Percy with a sigh, and turning away.

Mr. Hermon held open the door for him.

"Well—wish you luck, Buckle," he said drily but kindly.

Until he got outside the shop, Percy had not remembered that he did not know Mrs. Woolright's address. He concluded, however, that she would be more likely to be stopping at one of the two hotels than in private lodgings. He hurried along the windy Parade, where a few muffled visitors wandered disconsolately, and ran up the steps of The Haven. Mrs. Woolright was not known there. At The Links, at the other end of the Parade, he ran her to earth. A maid, looking curiously at his

agitated face when he said that he wanted to see Mrs. Woolright urgently, gave his message and, returning, took him upstairs to private rooms on the first floor.

Mrs. Woolright's jolly deep-chested "Come in!" somewhat calmed him, and he entered the cosy sitting-room, where a fire burned cheerfully, feeling that, perhaps, he was unnecessarily scrupulous in coming to explain his error.

Mrs. Woolright, who looked more beautiful than ever in an amber tea-gown, seemed more amused than surprised to see him. He stammered something about medicine and a mistake. For a moment her face looked grey and old, but as he went on to explain her colour came back.

"Good gracious, man, how you frightened me!" she said rather tartly.

"Oh, it couldn't possibly have made much difference," he hastened to assure her.

"No?" she asked, raising her eyebrows quizzically. "I suppose that's how doctors and chemists make such a lot of money?"

Rather piqued, he endeavoured to correct her ideas.

"Oh, the *Tinctura Gelsemii* is undoubtedly an adjunct to the mixture."

"Tinct—what?"

"Tincture of Yellow Jasmine."

"Yellow Jasmine for neuralgia—how funny—and pretty, too," she said, smiling reflectively.

"Oh, there's a lot of poetry about drugs, if people would only consider," he assured her.

"Really?" she said, with an interested glance at his fresh, earnest young face.

"Yes—" he answered, and stopped, too shy to pursue the subject further. "Well, as I said," he continued hastily, "although the difference was not noticeable, I ought to have put it in, and I'm extremly sorry—"

"Oh, bless you," she said, cutting him short, "I was none the wiser, though I've had it made up half a dozen times. It's worry, I suppose. I always get neuralgia when I'm bothered."

There was a little pause, and Percy, feeling that he had no excuse for remaining, said, "Well—if you'll give me the bottle."

"Are you in a hurry—have a cigarette?" she said good-naturedly.

He began to make excuses, but she waved him to a chair, saying—

"Do sit down, you look horribly upset."

He obeyed, and took a cigarette from the gold case she held out to him. As he sat down, he was struck by the look of preparation in the warmly curtained, soft-carpeted room. It was as if some one were expected. Apparently, Mrs. Woolright had been unpacking when he

disturbed her; an evening gown was flung over the back of a chair, and an open dressing-case stood in the doorway of the bedroom beyond, where the reflection of a fire flickered on the yellow wall-paper. As if she followed his thoughts, she said—

“I’ve nobody to talk to for the moment; my husband can’t get here till this evening.”

“Well,” she said, when she had lit a cigarette, “what made you come and tell me this?”

Percy wished he had the courage to say, “To see you again.” Instead, he replied—

“I couldn’t feel comfortable until I had corrected my mistake.”

“But if nobody knew?”

“Oh, well—as a matter of principle.”

“Ah!” she said, looking at the end of her cigarette with a thoughtful smile.

“Well,” she continued, “supposing I had made a fuss?”

Percy was not sorry for this opportunity to tell her what he had risked. She turned round in her chair, and leaning her chin on her hand, listened with interest. Percy noticed that in spite of her general air of well-being, her face in repose took on a melancholy expression. He was struck, too, by the impression that she studied and made the most of her personal appearance, but not as if to attract others.

It was as if she took an artistic pleasure in the care of her body.

“And you think,” she said, when he had finished, “that even when what you do makes no difference to anybody but yourself, you ought to stick to principle?”

“One must play the game,” said Percy.

She turned away, and for a little while was silent, smiling rather sadly to herself.

“I wonder,” she murmured.

“I’m sure of it,” he said.

“Well, look here—here’s a case,” she said abruptly. “I know a woman, a good little woman too, but negative—colourless—whose husband is kind to her in every way, but—I suppose you’d say he doesn’t play the game. There’s another woman, you know, not a patch on his wife, except in looks and a sort of intensity, but loyal and loving. Well, the man argues that it’s all right. His wife doesn’t know, doesn’t dream—she believes in him, and he says that so long as she isn’t worried—”

“It isn’t playing the game,” said Percy, shaking his head.

“But you see, they—he and the other woman—do care an awful lot for each other. She’s—I’m afraid she isn’t a bit better than she ought to be—but there it is. It’s the real thing, you know. It isn’t one of those beastly

sordid arrangements; she gets nothing but just him."

"Oh," said Percy, "I'm not a moralist, you know." She looked hugely amused, but he went on defiantly, "And so far as they are concerned, I don't see why they shouldn't—but it's the wife."

"Still," said Mrs. Woolright, dabbing her cigarette on an ash-tray, "she doesn't suffer, because she doesn't know. He doesn't in any way neglect her for the other woman. Every now and then—but not often—they—he and the other woman—arrange to meet, and go quietly away somewhere for a week or two and forget everything but each other. You mustn't think it's a case of riotous living, spending a lot of money so that the wife goes short of it; they—he and the other woman—can be passionately happy in the simplest way."

"Doesn't affect the question," said Percy stoutly, "he ought to play the game. He's promised, and he should stick to his promise."

"And you think she—the other woman—ought to give him up?"

"Yes; don't you?"

"Well, I'm not sure," said Mrs. Woolright, with a little nervous laugh. "*She* thinks so, sometimes—when he isn't there. But the moment she sees him—" She rose abruptly,

and with flaming cheeks bent to stir the fire.

Percy went hot all over. He understood, and in another moment he would have stammered idiotic apologies, but she saved him.

"I should think you're very interested in your work, aren't you?" she said in a matter-of-fact tone, smoothing down her dress as she knelt on the rug.

He tried to tell her about himself and his ambitions. She listened sympathetically, drawing him out with leading questions.

"You ought to be very happy, Mr. Buckle," she said, "with such definite objects. Keep young, oh, keep young and single—I don't mean don't marry if you want to—but don't complicate your life. It's always a mistake."

On leaving he stammered his gratitude for her forbearance over his blunder.

"Oh, not at all," she said, with her sleepy smile, "I'm glad it happened. I've quite enjoyed our little chat."

"I'll send the medicine round at once," he said.

"Oh, there's no hurry about that," she said absently, "my neuralgia's a lot better—even without the Yellow Jasmine! Any time this evening will do."

"Well?" said Mr. Hermon, significantly pull-

ing out his watch, when Percy got back to the shop.

“Oh, she was very nice about it,” said Percy modestly.

“Buckle—it’s my belief you’re a dawg,” said Mr. Hermon.

Percy did not reply, but immediately set about making up the medicine for Mrs. Woolright. Walter, the errand-boy, happened to be out for the afternoon, and, consequently, it was nearly two hours later when Percy sent him round to the hotel with the corrected medicine. He was absent a considerable time, and returned with the bottle in his hand.

“The lady’s gone,” he said indignantly, “and I’ve been badgered with questions till I don’t know who I am.”

Almost on his heels, a tall, middle-aged man, with a very pale face, grizzled hair, and a pointed black beard, entered the shop.

“A Mrs. Woolright called here to get some medicine made up?” he said, civilly but abruptly.

Percy said “Yes,” rather hoping—though he did not exactly know why—that his visit to the hotel would be resented; but the man evidently considered him of no consequence except as a possible source of information.

“Apparently Mrs. Woolright has found it

necessary to change her plans rather suddenly," he said, with assumed indifference, though his eyes were haggard with anxiety. "And the people at the hotel seemed to think that she might have mentioned to you where she was going."

His eagerness to snatch at the faintest clue was so evident that Percy felt quite sorry for him.

"Mrs. Woolright said nothing to me," he said; and then feeling that he ought to be frank, he added, "I had to go to the hotel to see Mrs. Woolright. There was some little doubt about the directions on the bottle, and we make it a practice to take every precaution."

"Quite so, quite so," said the man absently; adding, as if to himself, "It's very perplexing," and staring at the floor with sombre eyes.

"Can I do anything?" said Percy.

"Oh no, thanks," said the other, coming out of his reverie. "No doubt I shall hear to-night. I only thought that, possibly— Well, good evening."

Two mornings later, when Percy got down to the shop, Mr. Hermon greeted him waggishly.

"Letter for you, Buckle—came this morning. The missis hopes it's all right—she takes a motherly interest in you, you know."

Percy, who felt a hard lump in the delicately

scented envelope, did not open it until he was alone. The enclosure was a little sprig of Yellow Jasmine. Written, in a large, irregular hand, in violet ink, on the paper were the words: "Thanks. I've played the game."

VIII

OTHER TIMES, OTHER—MORALS

“Do have another kidney, Harold ; they’re so nice,” said Mrs. Pontifex, holding the little silver dish insinuatingly under her husband’s nose. He looked up from the letter he was reading.

“A—um—well, d’you know, I rather think I will,” he said, and helped himself to the savoury morsel, while his wife leaned one hand affectionately on his shoulder.

“From the Canon, dear ?” she asked, softening her voice reverently as she glanced at the crested notepaper in his hand.

“Yes, my love,” said Pontifex, pushing away the dish with a vague movement, while keeping his eyes fixed on the letter.

Mrs. Pontifex kissed the tiny bald spot on the top of her husband’s head. He winced a little, and put up his disengaged hand as if to arrange his hair over the place. His wife, moving noiselessly over the thick carpet, sat

down behind the elaborately appointed coffee tray.

"Won't you read it to me, Doodlums?" she asked, calling him by his pet name, over her cup.

"Er—yes, if you like," he said, with a little deprecating laugh.

"My dear Mr. Pontifex," he read aloud, "I could not rest content with a merely verbal expression of my gratitude for your extreme generosity in giving your services to the Bazaar in aid of our new Clergy House. Not often do the inhabitants of a remote country parish have the opportunity of hearing the masterpieces of English literature interpreted by one of the foremost dramatic artists of the day. Our little entertainments are *always* well supported by what poor local talent we possess, and I am of the opinion that the *intention*'—er—um—yes . . . 'It would be presumptuous of me to say more than how *deeply* I enjoyed your recitations—particularly "Unto This Last" with organ accompaniment. I, for one, am not ashamed to say that at the conclusion of the piece my eyes were not innocent of tears. One seemed to almost hear through the open Gates a waft of that angelic music which'—er—h'm! 'But, if you will not deem it an impertinence, I wish now to thank

you for a more *personal* matter. I speak not for myself alone, but for countless numbers, thank God, who cannot view without grief and alarm the social degeneration so rife in our midst'—er—'It is, I say, a blessing and a comfort to realise that even in these days there is, at least, one man standing in the public eye who, nevertheless, both in his Art and in his *Life*, rallies to the banner of the old Faith, and, despite the sneers of "Society" (save the mark!), bears witness to the sanctity of the *English Home*. Trusting that your dear wife, to whom commend me, was none the worse for her cold journey back to London, yours very sincerely, Herbert Langley Saunders.'"

"What a *very* nice letter, Harold," said Mrs. Pontifex, with tears in her eyes.

There was a reason for her emotion beyond the actual words of the Canon's letter. During the early days of their married life, when Pontifex was a touring actor, he had not shown that enthusiasm for the sanctity of the English home which so impressed his present correspondent. He complained that his wife was unsympathetic; she retorted that it was difficult to keep a blind faith in the sacred cause of art when a considerable portion of the artist's earnings were devoted to the entertainment of his colleagues—male and female—

while she herself needed a new pair of boots. For some years the Pontifexes did not live together. Then, almost by accident, Pontifex hit upon his peculiar talent as an interpreter of what might be called "Pieces with a strong Domestic and Religious Flavour." Success followed, and the Pontifexes were not the first couple to discover that compatibility of temperament depends to a considerable degree on material circumstances. So they came together again, and with regular meals his more exalted aspirations died away, while her faith in him and in art was supported by a steadily increasing balance at the bankers. They had now lived for six years in a charming little house at Wimbledon. Besides fulfilling numerous and lucrative engagements, Pontifex was codirector, with a celebrated actor-manager, of a Dramatic Studio in Sloane Street.

For a few minutes they continued their breakfast in silence. Pontifex was a tall, romantic-looking man of about thirty-five, with wavy black hair and moustache, and melancholy brown eyes. Though he was not too stout, his figure gave the impression of being retained only by the strenuous use of mechanical devices, and his white face had the peculiar opacity which comes from habitual good living. He was eminently well-larded. Mrs. Pontifex

was the type of woman one calls a sensible little body. She had long outgrown the early romanticism which rapt her from a country parsonage to share the life of a struggling actor, and it is probable that the bald spot on the top of her husband's head, that signal of surrender to the sobering advance of years, was more precious to her than all his talent.

While consuming his meal with slow enjoyment, Pontifex continued to open and read his letters. There was a little bundle of Press-cuttings, mounted on pale green paper, in an orange wrapper; an invitation to speak at the forthcoming Church Congress on "The Influence of the Drama"; a request for an interview from the *Ingle-Nook*; two applications for the prospectus of the Studio; a letter from a Countess asking his terms for an evening, "You'll forgive these business details, my dear Mr. Pontifex"—and, last of all, a small envelope with black edges, addressed in a hand he seemed to remember.

The enclosed letter began without preliminaries, and ran:—

"As you will see, I am in London. Will you meet me at Charing Cross by the bookstall where the boat-train starts, at half-past one on

Thursday? I have something important to tell you.—MURIEL IMAGE."

Pontifex remembered Muriel Image very well. She belonged to the struggling days—only six years ago—when he employed his too frequent intervals of "resting" by teaching elocution. To Muriel Image he had poured out the aspirations of his fiery soul, the story of his unhappy life with a woman who did not appreciate his genius, and Muriel, at least, had—sympathised. But not to the extent his passionate nature then demanded. For some scruple she had remained firm against his pleading, though she admitted that she loved him.

"What is it, dear?" asked Mrs. Pontifex rather anxiously.

"Only a begging letter," he replied; adding, with commendable ingenuity, "from one of the old boys who is down on his luck."

"Is it anything you can do?" said his wife, perhaps a little coldly.

"I must think it over," he said, passing his plump white hand over his brow. "The moment one achieves a little hollow fame there are so many calls on one's purse," he added with a sigh.

"Dear Harold," said she, "you are generous to a fault."

Pontifex gathered up his letters and retired to his warm and luxuriously furnished study. On the walls, between the books, there were engravings after Sir Noel Paton, and enlarged photographs of scenes from *The Sign of the Cross*.

He was very grateful now for Muriel Image's scruple, but still he felt rather uncomfortable. Addressed through his old agent, the letter had reached him considerably later than the writer intended, and to-day was already Thursday. There was no time to reply, and Pontifex did not like to ignore it altogether. He did not particularly want to see Muriel Image again, but his naturally kind heart could not bear the thought of her waiting in the cold station, only to be disappointed in the end. This was his morning at the Studio, where he took lunch, and with a slight sacrifice of comfort he could easily get to Charing Cross by half-past one. He wondered what Muriel wanted, and it speaks for his good-nature that the possibility of her communication being a "begging letter" after all, did not deter him from the meeting. Though, to be sure, it was unlike Muriel Image to ask help of him. She was gently born, and always more ready to give than to take.

Though, at the cost of his digestion, Pontifex

reached the meeting-place two minutes before the half-hour, Muriel Image was there already.

She came forward, a tall, graceful girl in mourning, pale to the lips with excitement, but with a passionate look of welcome in her dark eyes, moist with happy tears.

“Harold!” she said, holding out both her hands.

After this interval of time, his name sounded improperly familiar on her lips, and he rather stiffly gave her his hand, from which he had forgotten to remove the thick, lined glove.

“Well, Muriel,” he said, in a tone and with a smile that he fancied paternal.

He mentally calculated that she must be now thirty-one. She did not look her age, however, so eager were her eyes, so spirited her movements. She had a rather long, oval face, with full but firm lips, and a slightly prominent chin; the face of a woman who would take her own way with life. He observed with relief that she was comfortably, even well dressed, and that she looked properly fed. While they stood smiling nervously at each other, he felt that he ought to make some reference to her mourning. As if she had read his thoughts, she said in a low voice—

“My mother died six weeks ago; so that

I——” She did not finish the sentence, but coloured deeply.

“I’m so sorry,” murmured Pontifex—and he was. He remembered her scruple now.

“It is not for myself, dear,” she had said, when he begged her to share his life, “I’ve no silly prejudices. But my mother has quite conventional ideas, and—anything of that sort —would break her heart.”

“Well,” he said, now, looking nervously round the platform, sufficiently deserted to make them a mark for curious observers, “shall we go somewhere out of the cold?”

“Oh, but have we time?” she said, glancing up at the clock and away with embarrassment.

“Just as you like,” he said, in no desire to prolong the interview unnecessarily. There was an awkward silence, and he wondered how he could remind her of the important news she spoke of in her note.

“Would you mind taking care of my satchel?” she asked, with a nervous laugh. “I’ve—I’ve got rather a lot of money with me, and somebody might snatch——”

“Oh, certainly,” he said, and took the dainty bag from her hand. She trembled and caught her breath as their fingers met.

“You’re looking very well,” she said, a little regretfully.

"Oh, I'm well enough," he admitted, with a sigh.

"She is still——?"

"I'm still married," he said gravely; adding with imperfect regard for lucidity, "In name only."

She understood him, however.

"You make me very glad," she murmured, laying her hand for a moment on his arm.

"Do I?" he murmured.

"Dear, caged eagle! Of course, I've heard of your success. It's not — quite — what I expected. But," she said, with a little appreciative chuckle, "how well you do it! I often think that if these solemn Philistines could look into your heart! Well, I suppose it has to be done?"

"One must live," he said gloomily, "and fulfil one's obligations."

"She is extravagant?" she asked, flushing angrily.

"Oh, well," he replied tolerantly, "one gets the luck one deserves."

"Do you ever see her?" she muttered.

He nodded sadly.

"Sometimes."

"How awful, Harold!"

"Do you remember what you said, Muriel?" he murmured, fixing his melancholy eyes upon

her. “‘Keep your soul, but render unto Cæsar?’ I keep my soul.”

“And the other—how far do you render unto Cæsar?” she asked him nervously.

“We avoid scandals.”

“That you should have to pay so dearly for a boyish blunder—oh!” she murmured impatiently.

“Come,” he said, with a hoarse note in his voice, “tell me about yourself. Are you in the profession?”

“I was a rank failure,” she said, with a laugh. “Then I went to Germany. I took a situation with some people who wanted a companion. I had to read aloud—I owed that to you, Harold. I was not unhappy there. When my mother became very ill, I was telegraphed for—I was just in time. . . . Now, I’m comparatively— There will be no need for me to go back to Germany.”

They walked a few steps in silence.

“Properly invested, I trust?” he said absent-mindedly.

“Oh, Harold, how funny and grown-up you are!” she said, laughing, in spite of her emotion. “Do you remember how you said you would sing in the street for me?”

“I would have done more than that, Muriel,” he said, in that crooning, emotional voice which

thrilled the bosoms of peeress and parlourmaid. In spite of his strong disapproval of the conversation, his temperament could not resist the revival of an almost forgotten mood.

"I was cruel to you, Harold," she said faintly, "but, indeed, there was a reason——"

"You were always my good angel," he stoutly assured her; "you gave me strength and courage, you made me a better man. You taught me to conquer my selfish desires, to be true to my better self. Your teaching is not forgotten, Muriel."

She looked, perhaps, not so gratified as she might have been.

"I was rather given to preaching in those days," she said, rather acidly. "One learns; one gets a clearer idea of the things that are essential to happiness. And circumstances change. . . . Do you remember," she continued, quickening her pace, "how you used to talk about what we would do if—— How we would tramp about the Continent, you with your little bundle, I with my fiddle, the open road before us, the loaf of bread, the drink of fresh water from the running brook——"

"Yes, yes, I remember," he said, with an involuntary shiver. "Are you sure you won't take cold?" he stammered, stopping half-way in the act of turning up his overcoat collar.

"No, no," she said, shaking her head excitedly. "Well—that was what we said. But the loaf of bread was, perhaps, only figurative—there might be a little butter, and—" She laughed nervously and bit her lip.

"It is those dreams that have kept me going," he said, with deep feeling, "and the knowledge that—somewhere—you were dreaming too. I did not write ; it would have spoiled the perfect confidence, the mysterious identity. I have come to feel now, Muriel, what you told me then—that the finest thing of all is the union of the spirit, the—how shall I put it?—the true marriage of souls—"

"Yes?" she said, rather disconsolately.

"—Which is independent of proximity," he said, and thought it a fine conclusion.

They were silent for a little while. She slackened her pace, and the light was gone out of her eyes.

"But it is the pitiful waste of power," she broke out abruptly, "the constant irritation, the slights, the indignities, the selfish complaining."

"One mustn't whine," he said. "Please God, I shall win through," he added solemnly.

"But you don't truckle, you don't make foolish concessions?"

"Did I not say that I keep my soul?" he said proudly.

"You said in your note," he presently reminded her, "that you had something important—"

"Oh, did I?" she said absent-mindedly. "I wrote in a hurry, I was very anxious to—to see you."

During the last quarter of an hour there had been a gradual invasion of the platform. People carrying bags and travelling-rugs were swarming down the stairs. He remarked on the number of foreign-looking faces.

"The boat-train at two-twenty," she reminded him, "to Folkestone. One gets to Paris about a quarter-past nine, that is—" She broke off, and swung round to stare at the bookstall.

For perhaps ten seconds Pontifex forgot his unique position as a pillar of Pure Art and the English Home. He knew now why Muriel Image had asked him to meet her by the bookstall where the trains leave for the Continent. He could hear her quick, uncertain breathing, and a faint echo of his old passion for her came back to him. Never, even in the old days when, half inclined to yield, she had desperately fought against her own heart and his urgency, had she looked more alluring than now, with readiness in every fibre of her body.

For ten seconds he was on the edge of one of those mad actions of the sober-living man which, periodically, startle the undiscerning. He had only to say one word— But the tide of use and wont swung back again : he thought of the snug little house at Wimbledon, the comfortable give-and-take of his present married life, the easy fame, the genial popularity.

“Where are you living now?” he asked dully.

She looked embarrassed.

“I—I have no plans,” she said evasively. “My mother’s house, at Chislehurst, is on my hands till March. I spent the last few days with some friends at Fulham. I—may go back to them ; I mean they’ve asked me to stay a little longer.”

“Haven’t you decided where you’re going to live?”

“Oh, anywhere,” she said impatiently. “I don’t want to tie myself down. I may go back to Germany—the people would be glad.”

“I would ask you to come and see me sometimes,” he said, “only—”

She glanced at him sideways, and, he fancied, ironically.

“But that would be selfish,” he hurried on ; “I can go on as I have done, alone, unhelped, except by the knowledge that—”

"We mustn't spoil the true marriage of souls, Harold," she said softly.

The bustle on the platform increased. Pontifex looked at the clock; it was a quarter past two.

"Must you go?" she said in a conventional tone.

He muttered something about an engagement, adding, "Can I get you a cab?"

"Oh no, thanks, I've got some things in the cloak-room," she said, blushing, in painful confusion, "and I'd like to see this train go. I'm always interested in people going abroad; they look so happy, as if they were beginning a new life. Besides, I ought to say good-bye to somebody."

He looked at her inquiringly.

"I think," she said, in a dreadful tone, and turning away her head, "I think he is called —Hope. By the way," she added briskly, "I mustn't forget my bag! All my worldly wealth is in it."

"Oh, I'm so sorry," he muttered apologetically, as he gave her the bag. Under cover of the little embarrassed laugh at his forgetfulness, she managed to say good-bye.

When he reached the head of the stairs, he looked down on the platform. Her back was

towards him, and she was waving her hand to the departing train.

When the eagle returned to his cage, a bright fire burned in the drawing-room, and there were muffins in the fender.

“Oh, here you are, Doodlums,” said Mrs. Pontifex, laying down her embroidery; “come and have some tea and warm yourself. Here are your slippers.

He sat down wearily in the thickly padded arm-chair.

“You’ve just missed dear old Lady Hitcham,” said his wife, handing him the muffins. “She came to ask you about a Christmas party for her grandchildren. She thought perhaps that funny little thing of your own about the Bobo and the Garraway——”

Pontifex viciously stirred the fire.

“That tiresome old Studio wears you out,” said his wife, eyeing him anxiously. “Why don’t you give it up?”

He murmured something about his duty to the younger generation of talent.

“Well,” she said, “I’m very glad you’ve no engagements to-night. We’ll have a cosy evening all to our two selves. I’ve arranged a nice little dinner, and told Martha to get up some of the Roby claret—I’m sure you may

indulge for once in a way. We'll go to bed nice and early—and, I don't think I should get up for Early Service if I were you, Harold."

Something in his face attracted her attention.

"Now, Doodlums!" she said, with sudden illumination, and shaking her plump forefinger at him, "you've been bothering about that wretched man who wrote to you for help. I know you have!"

"One can't disregard one's obligations to less fortunate fellows," he mumbled.

"Was it *very* sad, then?" said Mrs. Pontifex, patting his head.

"A very distressing case," said Pontifex, helping himself to another muffin.

IX

MR. JOSEPH TOTTERDILL

PART I

THE MAN OF IDEAS

THE two Totterdills, father and son, sat in what might be called an active silence. They had spent a happy afternoon together, if such bloodless contentment could bear out the word, and, though there had been long intervals in which neither had spoken, this was the first time they were aware of it, and, waiting for the other to speak, each felt as awkward as he ordinarily looked. Both were bad actors, and the longer they waited the more obvious grew their discomfort, the more pregnant the silence. The room, or rather the apartment—for a room suggests human atmosphere—in which they sat looked out on the main street of a provincial town, and was secluded from it only by a wire gauze blind, which barely served the purpose of discretion. The room was filled

with books, but missed the dignity of a library, the exclusiveness of a study, because there were too many series, and the bindings were neither old enough to be suggestive, nor so new as to please the eye. One felt that the volumes fulfilled merely the rational purpose of books, to record information, as the men performed only the logical functions of their kind.

Sensitive persons on being told that Mr. Joseph Totterdill was the son of his father experienced a slight shock, as if they had inferred that he was the product of some calculation, rather than the fruit of any man's body. Joseph Totterdill's appearance was delicate, but as little refined as a galvanometer is refined. His large, smooth, round forehead was made for reasoning, his pale eyes for observation, his small and admirably shaped mouth for logical speaking and the reception of appropriate nourishment. His fine brown beard give him neither virility nor expression, but simply advertised his age as about forty-three. He sat before a microscope at a table fitted into the window recess, whilst his father reclined in a chair so scientifically comfortable, so obviously designed for relaxation, that a stranger would have avoided it with the rebellious instinct of a child bidden to run

about and play under unsympathetic observation. The chair's history was written upon it; one knew that it had been procured at the precise moment when to recline becomes the privilege of age. Though of excellent quality and construction, it wore the look of those pieces of furniture included in parlour suites, and advertised with dismal propriety, "lady's arm-chair" and "gentleman's arm-chair."

The visible man of the elder Totterdill was arranged in a convention peculiarly offensive to most people. He was ostentatiously venerable, wearing his white hair long to his shoulders in unwholesome-looking curls. Lying on the arm of his chair were a shepherd's plaid and a soft felt hat, and these, together with the heavy stick which Mr. Totterdill still held by its curved handle, proclaimed the fact that he had recently come in from walking. Now and then Mr. Joseph Totterdill involuntarily frowned as his eyes fell on the plaid and wideawake so manifestly in the wrong place. The silence becoming unbearable he presently rose and, picking up the offending articles, carried them out of the room.

When he had returned to his place before the microscope, his father, the most human of the three, cleared his throat as one preparing for discussion.

"I wish to speak to you about Ida," he said.

The younger man got up, turned his chair round, sat down, crossed his legs, folded his arms, and gazed coldly at his father.

Ida was Joseph's half-sister, twelve years younger than himself. Both Mr. Totterdill's wives had expired—died were too active a word—within a few years of fulfilling their natural obligations to him. The first had borne him a son to continue his name, the second a daughter to solace his declining years. Both children had neglected their obvious duties; the son had never married, the daughter had, thus accepting responsibilities which made her less available for those offices which it is no exaggeration to say Mr. Totterdill thrust upon her in the hour of her birth. Ida's husband was an unforeseen accident of the pursuits to which her brother and father applied rather than devoted their lives. Both were notorious, though scarcely distinguished, botanists and entomologists. Mr. Henry Letts was a celebrated traveller, and a collector of orchids; lean, brown, hot-eyed and eccentric; a follower of strange 'isms; hail-fellow with Oriental and South American savages. During a temporary aberration into flesh and blood, due, he alleged, to an unaccustomed diet of animal food, he had desired and married Ida

Totterdill. Two years later, when Mr. Letts had regained his normal insanity, he heard himself called in the night ; and when he rose up in the morning told his wife that he started that day for Brazil. She wished to go with him, but he frowned at the suggestion.

“No, no,” he said, gesticulating wildly, “you will be in the way ; you will want food, clothes, and things. I can live on caterpillars ; baggage is a nuisance,” and immediately set about packing a small portmanteau.

During his absence Ida’s brother came to live with her for propriety.

“I have heard unpleasant things about Ida,” continued Mr. Totterdill.

“That is a great nuisance, but no more than I expected,” said Joseph.

“I trust you will not convey to others than myself the opinion so glibly expressed in the latter half of your sentence,” said Mr. Totterdill in a tone of dry displeasure.

“Why ?” asked Joseph argumentatively. “Indiscreet behaviour cannot fail to be noticed and commented upon, and it is surely undignified to attempt contradiction of that which is obvious to every intelligent observer.”

His father looked at him with almost indignation. Each despised the other more than a little : Mr. Totterdill because Joseph was the

logical extremity of himself, Joseph because his father had twice lent himself to that absurd relation of which he was a visible consequence.

"I did not imply actual or even attempted contradiction," persisted Mr. Totterdill. "However, it is true, then, that Ida permits more frequent interviews to Mr. James Pearson than is compatible with discretion?"

"Perfectly true. I have already pointed out to my sister that such conduct is likely to prejudice her social reputation."

"That was foolish of you," snapped Mr. Totterdill.

"I am not aware," said Joseph, with austere politeness, "that I have ever in my life given expression to views which were not the product of sound reasoning."

"I believe you," admitted Mr. Totterdill. He was not quite capable of the ironic conclusion "hence you are a fool," but continued: "What I intended to convey was this. My experience of women" (the old man nearly blushed under his son's impassive stare), "or rather my memory of what observant people have remarked of average woman, and both Ida and her mother were average woman—yours on the contrary was exceptional"—(Joseph bowed) "is that one cannot consider them as entirely rational beings. In face of a

logical exposition of facts they frequently remain unconvinced ; and instead of profiting by advice, tend rather to pursue an opposite line of conduct."

"That is extremely foolish and unreasonable," said Joseph coldly.

"Exactly," said Mr. Totterdill, shifting his feet irritably ; "but it is nevertheless true of the sex."

"I should have supposed that my sister was not wanting in intelligence," said Joseph almost airily."

"Nor is she ; but she is a woman."

"That surely," said Joseph, in a tone of philosophical inquiry, "is only a statement of degrees ? I fail to see why women should not reason correctly within the limit of their faculties, even if they have not the sustained power necessary to arrive at perfectly just conclusions. However," he added, with filial deference, "since you are of the opinion that I was mistaken in speaking to Ida as I did, what course of action do you suggest that I ought to have pursued ?"

"You should have spoken to Mr. James Pearson."

Joseph coloured slightly under his parchment skin.

"And exposed myself to the risk of physical

violence at his hands?" he asked in a tone of shaken dignity.

"Not if you used tact in making your communication," replied his father. "Mr. Pearson is a gentleman and, but for his unfortunate attachment to your sister, a man of honour."

"Tact!" said Joseph, with a triumphant sneer. "The word is unworthy of you, father; an idle word constantly in the mouth of loose-thinking people who are incapable of expressing themselves clearly. If you will refer to your 'Skeat,' I believe you will find that it is derived from a root which means 'touch' or 'feeling,' one of those verbal evasions, the last resort of feeble minds."

There were times when Mr. Totterdill regretted the exemplary education of his son.

"However," continued the latter, with a complacent feeling of victory, "who has spoken to you of Ida's behaviour?"

"Mrs. Campion," said his father shortly. If it were possible there was a gleam of malicious amusement in Joseph's pale blue eyes. People had said that Mr. Totterdill might marry yet a third time, and that Mrs. Campion was more than willing.

"You cannot fail to admit," continued Mr. Totterdill in a slightly hurried voice, "that my informant is a person of sound judgment and praiseworthy motives."

“Undoubted judgment, exemplary motives,” said Joseph drily; “I am glad to learn, by the way, that the unscientific expression you lately used, was contagious rather than deliberate. What remedy did Mrs. Campion propose?”

Mrs. Campion did not presume to propose anything,” replied his father tartly; “she however agreed with me as to the wisdom of two alternatives: either that you should take Ida abroad for a few months, or that you, or I, should speak to Mr. Pearson’s relatives, and beg them to persuade him of the folly and inconvenience of his conduct.”

“The latter course would be preferable, or, to be exact, the last half of the latter alternative,” said Joseph anxiously. He had an uneasy suspicion that Mrs. Campion wished him out of the way for her own ends.

“No, I do not think so,” retorted his father, with a touch of warmth. “It is a mistake to increase the field of discussion. In such a case as this, least said soonest mended. In time the gossip will die a natural death.”

“That seems to me inconclusive,” said Joseph, “and your use of popular phrases encourages me to believe that you do not speak from conviction. A thing is a fact or not a fact. In this case it is unfortunately true that Ida has shown a want of judgment in her

constant society with Mr. James Pearson. How many or how few persons know of it is a matter of little consequence. And as for its dying a natural death, that is absurd ; a fact lives for ever whether people remember it or not," he added reverently, like an only mourner. " The reasonable thing to do," continued Mr. Joseph Totterdill, with a brisk air of worldliness, " when a fact is objectionable—as in the present instance I am bound to confess it is—is to neutralise it with other and contradictory facts, such as breaking off the connection. As for Mrs. Campion's suggestion that I should take Ida abroad, that is preposterous. Ida would not be a congenial travelling companion, nor do I feel called upon to endure the noise and discomfort of Continental hotels on account of her perversity."

" What are you going to do, then, to break off the connection ? " asked Mr. Totterdill impatiently.

" I shall repeat my admonition to Ida when I reach her house," answered Joseph, with stubborn mildness, " and I shall also communicate with the relatives of Mr. James Pearson to the effect that his conduct is unbecoming and prejudicial to Ida's position as the wife of Henry Letts. . . . And now I shall be glad if you will not interrupt me for fifteen minutes.

I wish to verify certain important observations I have made on the disposition of the essential organs of *Arum maculatum*."

So saying, Mr. Joseph Totterdill rose and, returning his chair with punctilious accuracy to its original position, resumed his botanical investigations. His father said no more, but seating himself at his roll-top desk applied himself to the MS. which he had been engaged upon that morning.

Presently tea was brought into the study by an almost improperly sexless housemaid, dressed with horrid suitability to her calling. Father and son ate largely of well-buttered muffins, and drank many cups of tea with serious avidity. The elder made noises, the younger did not. Neither smoked, and the two men sat hiccoughing gently until Mr. Joseph Totterdill drew out his watch and stated his intention of leaving.

"But I thought you were going to stay the night?" observed his father, with some surprise.

"Such was my original intention, I admit, though I did not say so," said Joseph severely.

"I have already ordered Jane to prepare a room for you, and also to make extra provision for dinner," grumbled the elder.

"That was injudicious," ventured Joseph,

"but the loss need not be irreparable. The edibles will surely keep until to-morrow, when you can invite Mrs. Campion to dine with you. Apparently," he added, as he gathered up his specimens, "you owe her a return of hospitality."

Mr. Totterdill glared at his offspring, but restrained himself. "May I ask the reason for your change of plan?" he asked, with sinister affability.

"Certainly," responded Joseph. "I find that by an unpardonable oversight I omitted to bring my statistics of the relative preponderance of *proterogynous* and *proterandrous* plants in a selected number of *dichogamous* species."

Mr. Totterdill rose to accompany him to the door. "You are in good time for your train," he said with formal politeness as they shook hands; "you will excuse me if I do not come with you to the station?"

"I should prefer that you did not," said Mr. Joseph Totterdill.

PART II

THE MAN OF ACTION

It was close upon eleven o'clock when Mr. Joseph Totterdill approached the residence of

Mr. Henry Letts. Prospect House was three miles from the railway station, and hung upon the brink of an abandoned quarry; the garden wall, which zigzagged along the edge of the precipice like the bastioned rampart of a goblin city, was indeed continuous on its outer aspect with the working face of the stone. Below was a sheer descent of nearly a hundred feet. The quarry had been cut back into the cliff of a turbulent river crossed by a stone bridge of three arches bearing the highway; which, after a long ascending curve, passed the drive gate of Prospect House, and, with a last effort, lifting itself over the hill, declined in a gentle slope on its way to the sea.

Joseph Totterdill rested on the bridge to adjust his mind from its habitually minute cogitations to the larger scale of visible objects, and to husband his breath for the tedious ascent before him. A violent wind had dropped, though the clouds were still moving rapidly from the south-west, with a fine drizzle of rain at intervals. The river was full and swift, pale with foam, and slid under the arches without any sound, except a deep gurgling against the buttressed piers. On the other side of the stream a white mist ascended, and, filling the bottom of the quarry, made the upper part of the cliff darker by contrast. Seen thus, the harsh

line of the wall cutting the sky, recalled the confines of some Castle Dangerous rising out of a fairy sea. From the bridge only the roof of Mr. Letts' house was visible—a long roof, indescribably saurian, as if some gigantic reptile were crouching ready to spring over the wall, and descend into the quarry. Under the flying moon the wet slates gleamed like scales.

The sight affected Joseph Totterdill unpleasantly with a sudden realisation of his sister's loneliness—as nearly pity perhaps as his sapless nature was capable of feeling. His narrow, but shrewd, intelligence made him aware that on her part Ida's marriage had been a step into the dark, guided only by the will-o'-the-wisp attractions of a fanatic, whose character would not bear the continuous regard of intimacy; and that James Pearson was in the truest sense her natural affinity. For himself he could not understand how people could suffer discomfort and censure for the sake of a companionship frowned upon by convention. He supposed that Ida and James Pearson were in love with each other—an unhealthy condition he associated vaguely with pictures of corsets on the advertisement pages of ladies' journals. Joseph himself experienced a tepid pleasure in contemplating these works of art, and believed that lovers derived a similar gratification from

each other's presence. That being so, he wondered why they did not, like himself, indulge their fancy by stealth, instead of affronting their neighbours by meeting openly.

Unused to speculation about his fellow-creatures, Joseph went on to think of the practical and unpleasant task of his approaching interview with Ida. The idea of personal inconvenience obscured the diviner feeling, and gave place to righteous anger; so that he bent himself to the long ascent rehearsing the bitterest speeches.

About fifty yards beyond the bridge the highway swung round to the right after giving off a cart-road into the quarry. The rain had ceased, and the moon shone bright and hard out of a momentarily cloudless sky. Joseph lowered his umbrella, shook it, and, using it for a walking-stick, slowly picked his way up the hill. For some distance the mist tried his breathing, so that he muffled his mouth in his woollen comforter with his left hand; but by the time he had rounded the curve, and was in sight of the drive gate, he was in a clearer air and walked upright, his footsteps quickened with ill-humour. The drive to Prospect House ran through shrubberies in a double curve to the left, where a second gate gave on to a rectangular lawn, reaching from the drawing-

room window to the boundary wall. As Joseph unlatched the gate with the point of his umbrella and pushed it open, he was surprised to see that the drawing-room was lit up. His eyes were fixed on the long, yellow blind of the French window, and, as he watched, two shadows appeared, lengthened, melted together, and separated. Then the window opened, and James Pearson stepped out on to the moonlit lawn.

Joseph let go the gate, which swung to with a crash. Pearson started, ran confusedly this way and that, and finally darted across the lawn. Joseph stood open-mouthed, too taken aback to shout a warning ; he had a momentary glimpse of Pearson's figure, humped against the sky ; there was a muffled cry, a rasping fall, then silence.

When James Pearson paid his first and only clandestine visit to Ida Letts, to hold her in his arms for the first and last time before leaving England, he did not reckon the length of the journey.

Joseph Totterdill fetched his breath in a feeble "Good gracious!" and moved irresolutely. His essential cowardice kept his mind upon his own horror.

"Good gracious!" he repeated, "how he frightened me."

He stood with one hand over his heart, mechanically counting its pulsations. Then, trembling all over and with belated presence of mind, he crept to the wall, and murmured foolishly—

“ Pearson, I say, Pearson, it’s me ; it’s Joseph Totterdill.” And again, “ Don’t be foolish, Pearson ; I’ll not tell anybody.”

There was no answer. Joseph sat down under the wall to steady his shaking limbs.

“ Why,” he muttered, “ the man must be killed—killed, and I saw it happen.” That was the essential fact, “ I saw it happen.”

Aroused by the definite idea, his narrow mind worked logically round to the consequences to himself. If Pearson were dead there would be an inquest, and he, Joseph Totterdill, would be called as a witness. His first thought was for self-preservation. Oh, he must not be dragged into that ! To be bullied perhaps by the coroner, catechised by the village grocer. And the scandal of it. People talked about Ida and James Pearson, and how strange it would appear that he should have returned unexpectedly to find them together. It would all come out at the inquest.

“ I saw it happen,” he muttered. “ No, I didn’t, I didn’t ! ” he protested, as if to a visible accuser. “ That’s just it,” he sniggered

hysterically; "I don't know anything about it."

He became calmer. Fear gave spurs to cunning, and his brain worked with the smoothness and celerity of a machine. It was very clear from Pearson's confusion that his visit to Ida was intended to be a secret. In all probability Joseph Totterdill was the only living person aware of the meeting, and that only by accident. He spread out his hands in an awkward gesture of irresponsibility. It was no business of his.

Presently the French window opened, and Ida looked out. Joseph crouched under the shadow of the wall. Ida shaded her eyes and called softly—

"Jim, Jim."

It struck Joseph as exquisitely humorous that Ida should be calling Jim whilst he was lying dead at the bottom of the quarry. He wagged his beard in the shadow and whispered: "It's no use your calling, he won't come again."

Ida stepped outside and looked up and down, listening. "Is anybody there?" she called sharply. Her deep sigh of relief was perfectly audible, and served for Joseph. She went back into the drawing-room and fastened the window.

Joseph Totterdill got up and, stepping gingerly into the moonlight, surveyed himself

all round. It was fortunate that it had been raining, otherwise there might have been a stain on his overcoat where he had sat down. He went to immense pains to rearrange his clothing and resume his expression of meaningless dignity; though like most criminals—and at that moment Joseph Totterdill was to all intents and purposes a criminal—he overlooked the most obvious considerations. In spite of all his efforts to be calm, his weak chin trembled, and at intervals his teeth ground together in a spasmodic clenching. Hugging the shadow he at last reached the gate, and shutting it with a decisive crash, walked briskly up the drive and round to the front door. He coughed noisily and made an unnecessary rattling with his latch-key as he let himself in.

Ida rose as he entered the drawing-room, and one hand went up to her breast.

She was a strikingly beautiful woman, with Joseph's delicate features quickened by emotion, her expression dominated by her wide brow and large, mournful eyes. She was pale, but apparently composed. Joseph, a ridiculous figure, still wearing his hat, stood leaning on his umbrella, staring at her with a silly smile. He tried to speak, but his quivering lips refused to form a word. Ida's face grew paler, and her eyes opened very wide.

"It has been very wet, but it is not raining at all now," said Joseph at last, in a hoarse cackle. Ida's colour came back, and she sat down again.

"Won't you take off your overcoat, Joseph?" she said quietly.

"Certainly, certainly, in a minute," said Joseph testily, because reminded of his oversight. "I wished to explain why I came home to-night." He spoke in a loud monotone, his goggling eyes fixed on hers, as if he held only by them, and would fall to pieces if he looked away. He was conscious of lurching knees and extreme thirst.

Ida smiled haughtily: she, though mistaken, had her own opinion as to the reason for Joseph's return.

"I found that I had left some important papers behind me, the absence of which made it impossible to continue the observations I was engaged upon," said Joseph, speaking the plain truth with all the outward symptoms of an elaborate liar. Ida did not speak, but unconsciously glanced up at the grandfather's clock in the corner.

"I came by the eight-thirty train," he explained, "but my asthma was troublesome, so that I took longer than usual to walk from the station."

"I thought I heard you twenty minutes ago," said Ida, speaking calmly, but looking him straight in the face. Joseph's eyeballs cracked.

"Oh, I'm sure you must have been mistaken, Ida," he said abjectly.

"Well, hadn't you better take your wet things off—if your breath is bad?" observed Ida coldly, as she turned away her head and picked up a book. Joseph left the room with stiff, jerky footsteps; he felt that he needed immense concentration of energy to perform reflex movements, and the pattern of the carpet nearly made him stumble. When he came back into the drawing-room, Ida asked him if he would have anything to eat or drink.

"Well, do you know," said Joseph, with almost archness, "I believe I would like a little whisky or brandy—if there is any in the house."

Ida looked at him keenly, but after a moment's hesitation answered—

"Yes, there is some whisky in the dining-room."

When she returned with the decanter and glass, Joseph continued to apologise for his unusual indulgence.

"I am not a believer in alcohol, as you know," he said, "and I have heard that it is contra-

indicated in asthmatical conditions; but I fancy, to-night, that a little whisky will do me good."

In his ignorance of its effects, he poured out a quantity of spirit which would have alarmed a moderate drinker. After swallowing a mouthful, with a self-conscious smile as if he were the subject of an interesting experiment, Joseph felt better. He leaned back in his chair and stretched out his legs. He had the criminal's perverse desire to talk round the subject he feared.

"Has anybody called?" he asked in a tone of polite curiosity.

"Nobody," answered his sister, without flinching.

"I didn't suppose that anybody would," said Joseph foolishly, and drank some more whisky. Ida's deliberate untruth seemed somehow a vindication of himself. Further emboldened, he pursued the hidden context of his words.

"I think we ought to have some protection put up on the garden wall," he said, with an awkward attempt to be casual, "an unclimbable fence, or even broken glass."

Ida turned quickly in her chair and gazed at him in exquisite agony. Joseph felt her eyes, and avoided them. He smiled in a ghastly way, which he intended to be reassuring.

"Of course it is not dangerous to ourselves," he said, "but there is a risk that—tradesmen's boys, or somebody—might be tempted to climb up to see what is on the other side."

Ida's breath came back in a long gasping sigh, and her figure relaxed. With the spirit warming his veins Joseph felt more self-controlled; he grew pot valiant, and even began to find a perverted pleasure in playing on his sister's tortured nerves.

"To see what is on the other side," he repeated, with a stupid smile. He wished to test his mind against the horror as one would lead a jibbing horse up to a traction engine. He was not gifted with a vivid pictorial imagination; but, as he sat sipping his whisky, his mental vision travelled across the lawn and up the wall and plunged into the depths of the quarry. The sweat broke out on his forehead, and the glass crashed suddenly in his hand.

The body! he had forgotten the body!

They started to their feet at the same moment with their eyes glued to each other's faces. Joseph was the first to recover. "Good gracious!" he exclaimed, stooping to wipe the whisky from his trousers. "How clumsy of me. I must have had a slight *rigor*; but these tumblers are ridiculously thin."

He began to pick up the pieces of broken

glass one by one, and to place them on the tray.

"Why, how nervous you are to-night, Ida," he said in a loud angry voice, though his own hands were trembling. "Hadn't you better go to bed?"

She mastered her agitation with a violent effort.

"Will you turn out the lamp?" she asked.

"I am not quite ready to retire, Ida," said Joseph, with elaborate dignity, "I have matters to attend to—important matters."

"Very well, I'll go and lock up."

Joseph sat down before the fire, and listened to Ida as she went out into the kitchen and locked the back door. She was a long time at the front, and Joseph had a sudden suspicion. He got up and tip-toed out of the drawing-room. The front door stood ajar, and Ida was not to be seen. Joseph's heart began to beat rapidly, thumping in his ears to the measure of "The body, the body, the body."

"Ida!" he called in a strangled voice. His sister appeared at the end of the shrubbery.

"Why don't you come in and go to bed," said Joseph irritably, "instead of prowling about in this ridiculous manner? It's not respectable."

Mrs. Letts came in, and, wishing him an abrupt "good-night," began to ascend the staircase. Joseph closed the door and laid his hand on the bolt. Then, with an afterthought, he called, "Ida, do not be alarmed if you hear me moving about, I am going out treacling."

Mrs. Letts paused at the turn of the stair, with her hand on the rail.

"Don't you think you ought to go to bed?" she asked; "I thought you said your chest was bad."

"It is absolutely necessary that I should secure certain nocturnal moths before to-morrow," said Joseph. "Go to bed. I really believe, Ida," he added, "that you think I'm the worse for liquor."

Mrs. Letts continued her ascent without speaking.

Joseph returned to the drawing-room, and sat down to consider his plans. The first effect of the whisky was passing off, and he felt horribly shaky. It was imperative that Pearson's body should be removed from the quarry. Joseph saw very clearly that he was an accessory after the fact, and since his manner had already attracted Ida's attention, very awkward questions might be asked: such as why had he not given immediate information of the accident; why had he not gone to

Pearson's assistance, since it was possible that he was yet alive?

He got a fresh tumbler and poured himself out some more whisky, artfully adding water to the decanter to preserve a decent level. Thrice he got up with the intention of setting about his task; thrice he sat down again, cramped with fear. At last the hands of the clock pointing to half-past twelve warned him that further delay was dangerous. He procured the dark lantern he used for night work, and, after a final gulp of whisky, stole out of the house and made for the quarry.

He found Pearson lying motionless on a shelving heap of rubbish beside one of the rusty cranes. Joseph was almost glad to find that he was dead. Pearson was a tall finely-built man of thirty-five, and Joseph thought of his heavy limbs as a personal grievance. For a long time he shrank from touching the body, but crept round it at a little distance, shooting the rays of his lantern on the white face. Apparently Pearson had died from internal injuries, since, with the exception of a slight abrasion on the right temple, there were no visible wounds or bruises. Though sick with fear Joseph had his wits about him. He took the precaution to remove a tuft of grass from Pearson's clenched fingers, and, stumbling over

the rubbish heaps, searched for his hat which had fallen some distance away. It was now very dark and raining steadily. Joseph left the body, and crossing the floor of the quarry to the bank of the river, a distance of about twenty yards, peered up and down until he found a place between the blackberry bushes where there was a clear drop of six feet into deep water.

He returned to the body, set down his lantern, and taking off his coat, summoned up all his strength and courage. After nearly a quarter of an hour's pulling and rolling he succeeded in getting Pearson's body to the brink of the river. Then he rested himself for the final effort. Pearson lay on his face, his head towards the water, one arm doubled under his forehead, the other stretched limply by his side, palm uppermost. Joseph stood over the body with one foot planted firmly on either side, and stooping, passed his hands under the armpits, and locked his fingers against the dead man's breast. Exerting all his muscles he lifted the awful burden, pushing out the loose, dangling legs with his foot until they hung over the stream. At the last moment he felt a throb under his interlaced fingers. His hands relaxed their clutch in a spasm of horror, and Pearson's body plunged heavily into the water.

Joseph fell on his hands and knees, and remained staring down into the river. Then he rose and rubbed his hands feverishly against his thighs, as if he would wipe off the memory of that terrible movement. He thought of the bridge, and hurrying back for his lantern, picked up Pearson's hat, ran out of the quarry and down the road. He clung to the parapet of the bridge like a drowned fly. It seemed an age, but at last a dark something shot out from under the arch, rolled over in the flood, and, as Joseph turned the glare of his lantern on the surface, it seemed as if the dead features of James Pearson smiled up at him ironically. He dashed Pearson's hat into the water and turned shudderingly away.

For a few days Joseph Totterdill lived in a state of abject fear. Pearson's disappearance was not made public for a whole week, when a notice came from Waterloo Station, where his luggage had been sent in advance, *en route* for the Continent. His mother became alarmed, and inquiries were made, which led to Mrs. Letts' frank statement that Pearson had paid her a farewell visit on his way up to London. Thus Joseph Totterdill learned that his crime had been gratuitous, and suffered the purgatory of his sister's haggard face as she watched daily for the letter which never came. Whatever

her suspicions, she did not stoop to question him.

It was three weeks before Pearson's body was found two miles down the river. People were impressed by the mournful candour of Mrs. Letts' evidence as the last person who had seen Pearson alive. An acute observer remarked that his physical death appeared to make but little difference to her. They had parted. Mr. Joseph Totterdill's appearance at the inquest was not considered necessary, since he had not reached home until twenty minutes after James Pearson left Prospect House. The medical evidence was interesting. Deceased, from certain symptoms, had apparently been drowned while in a state of insensibility. This was curious but not impossible, since there were many places on the banks of the river where a man falling might sustain severe injuries before reaching the water. Public but unspoken knowledge of Pearson's unfortunate attachment to Mrs. Letts prevented a sentimental jury from even hinting at suicide, and they returned a verdict of accidental death.

About four months after Pearson's death Mrs. Letts received a long and extraordinary communication from her husband. For many years, he said, he had been convinced of the fallacy of European social customs, and after

severe meditation in the primeval forest had decided to identify himself with a tribe of Tapuyas or native Indians, who, he asserted, had reached the highest state of true civilisation. Since polygamy was one of their obligatory customs he had married, according to native rites, the two daughters of their chief. As he did not suppose that Mrs. Letts shared his enlightenment, he advised her to take the customary steps to secure her freedom.

Mrs. Letts ignored her advantage, while refusing to accept an allowance from her husband. Mr. Joseph Totterdill interpreted her inaction as a personal grievance. He had supposed that Ida would divorce her husband and return to the paternal roof. Her determination to live alone with memory removed a sound reason why the elder Totterdill should not marry Mrs. Campion.

X

HE, SHE AND IT

THE death of Raymond Sylvester, of Prague, on the fifteenth of January 1897, was merely recorded in the English lay newspapers.

There was a short paragraph in the more important medical journals, to the effect that Immanuel von Reichardt, professor of surgery in the University of Vienna, had attended Sylvester's last moments and himself performed an autopsy, removing the brain according to Sylvester's dying request "as a legacy to my wife." Editorial comment was confined to an expression of profound regret and a short review of Sylvester's remarkable theories on the mechanism of consciousness.

Of himself nothing was known beyond the mere fact that he was an Englishman by birth who, after taking degrees at Cambridge and London Universities, disappeared from this country. He had apparently neither practised nor held any public appointment in England.

In the month of April, that is to say, three months after Sylvester's death, Orme, editor of the *Psychological Review*, received a paper on a question then hot in the air and purporting to have been written by Raymond Sylvester. From internal evidence it was impossible that it could have been composed during Sylvester's lifetime. The handwriting of the note accompanying the manuscript betrayed nothing, being, as in previous instances, that of a woman, presumably his wife. Orme wrote to the lady for an explanation; he received a civil reply stating "the communication is the work of Raymond Sylvester." This was, on the face of it, absurd, and Orme, a man of the highest discretion, hesitated to make use of an article of such doubtful authenticity.

There were several possible solutions of the enigma.

(a) The paper had been drafted by Sylvester, with almost prophetic foresight, and afterward adapted to the occasion by his widow or some unknown assistant — possibly von Reichardt.

(b) In spite of von Reichardt's testimony Sylvester was yet alive.

(c) Von Reichardt was Sylvester.

Orme inclined to (c). He therefore ap-

proached von Reichardt in a guarded letter suggesting his collaboration, at least, in the paper on "Dual Personality." Von Reichardt, a man of aristocratic birth and haughty temper, resented the implication in terms that prevented further correspondence. In short, no solution was arrived at, and Orme, unwilling to neglect a paper of such value, made use of it, satisfying his professional scruples by printing the name of its author in inverted commas, "Raymond Sylvester."

At this time the chief English opponent of Sylvester's theories was Dr. James Monroe. His reply to the posthumous paper on "Dual Personality" came as a surprise to his colleagues, who had regarded him as a man of dignified, if somewhat ponderous, character. On this occasion he betrayed a virulence of temper quite uncalled for by the subject under consideration, and evidently aroused by personal hostility to the dead man, whom he denounced as a charlatan and a mountebank. He allowed it to be understood that he had private reasons for his opinion based upon an acquaintance with Sylvester before he left England. Monroe's polemic was generally accepted as final proof that the paper on "Dual Personality" was a discreditable compilation by some surviving disciple of Sylvester. Cir-

cumstances pointed to von Reichardt; and when he himself died it was assumed that there would be no more Sylvester papers.

A few persons of imaginative turn were not satisfied with this arbitrary dismissal of the subject. Among them Fergus Halloran, who was at this time assistant pathologist to the London County Council. Halloran was about thirty years of age, tall and vividly handsome. His clean-cut features and virile movements gave the impression of great nervous energy; one felt that the outer man was moulded on a mind of singularly fine quality. In appearance he suggested the poet rather than the man of science. Perhaps by reason of his Celtic origin he was a combination of the exact thinker and the dreamer; a type somewhat unusual in his profession, though it is indeed a question if the more important scientific discoveries are not, in their conception, intuitive rather than deductive.

Halloran had already attracted some attention by his efforts toward the apparently hopeless task of localising the brain area concerned with purely intellectual processes. By some of the older men, Monroe in particular, he was looked upon as fanciful and unsound; though others, more perceptive, pointed out that whatever might be said of Halloran's ideas his methods were unusually painstaking; and, since the

meagre evidence from time to time collected seemed in support of his theories, he deserved at least serious consideration.

Less by temperament than of purpose, Fergus Halloran was extremely methodical in the division of his days and ascetic in his personal habits. He lived in quiet rooms in the older part of Hampstead. His laboratory duties took up the whole of his day ; he dined at six and, every day, whatever the season, took an hour's walking beforehand that his lonely meal might be salted with what human reflections he brought in from the street. For, unlike too many of his particular calling, he studied psychology at first hand and from the average man and woman.

One evening in the June following the death of Raymond Sylvester, Halloran was returning to his rooms by way of Railton Avenue, when he met a woman whose face at once attracted him as a student. She looked about twenty-three, but matured as by some heavy responsibility. Halloran reflected on the comparative rareness of a serious expression ; most people, most women especially, when unaware of notice, frown, simper, or gape. This girl looked straight ahead with a curious preoccupation of manner ; such a look as one sees in the eyes of soldiers home from active service. Halloran carried home an image of peculiar dignity.

On a second meeting, three days later, he was disappointed to observe the girl hesitate as if she invited recognition. Halloran coloured with vexation and passed quickly. Like most men of ardent nature he required a fastidious standard of conduct in women, and any want of reserve afflicted him as a personal humiliation. There only needed one more encounter to convince Halloran that he had been unjust, and to change his critical notice into a serious interest. As they drew together the woman swerved and looked full in his face. She was on the point of speaking, but, with a sudden flame in her cheeks, turned impulsively and walked on. When it was too late to overtake her, Halloran found a key to her behaviour; her eyes, quicker than her words, were those of one asking assistance. He did not see the girl again for some days, and was ready to confess to an increasing anxiety when, one evening, as he sat after dinner, his landlady announced a visitor.

“It’s the foreign lady, sir, who lives alone in Raleigh Place,” said the good woman, proud of her detailed information.

Halloran went downstairs to find the object of his recent speculations. Her candid “Oh! you are Dr. Halloran!” did not contain any romantic promise, but when she added, “I am

Mrs. Raymond Sylvester," Halloran looked at her sharply. He placed a chair for his visitor, who, however, remained standing ; she apparently found some difficulty in explaining her presence. To help her out with it, Halloran began—

"Can I be of service to you?"

"Yes," she answered, as one repeating a lesson, "I shall be glad if you will come at once to my husband."

Halloran did not betray any surprise ; indeed there was that in the girl's clear eyes which implored discretion. He looked at his notebook, unnecessarily except to imply that there was nothing unusual in her request, and said, "I will come with you now." Mrs. Sylvester gave a gasp of relief, and seated herself with an obvious failure of strength now that she had secured Halloran's assistance. She was on her feet immediately, mutely pleading him to make haste and spare her further words. Halloran called a cab and they drove in silence to Raleigh Place.

The house named by Mrs. Sylvester withdrew from the road with an air of discretion. As he followed the lady through a small, tidy, though uncultivated garden, Halloran was struck by the inhospitable appearance of the house front, not due to the actual structure,

which belonged to a period when geniality was a builder's virtue. The house was of red brick, with an iron balcony outside the three first-floor windows, which were furnished with green-painted louvre shutters now folded back against the wall. Though small, the place suggested an institution rather than a home; occupied, but inhuman; and not until Halloran stood upon the door-step did he realise that the cause was a vacancy in the windows from the absence of curtains. When Mrs. Sylvester pulled the bell handle there was no answering sound within the house. This was explained when the door was opened by an old woman with the spiritless countenance of a deaf mute, whose German features also made clear the landlady's misconception of Mrs. Sylvester's nationality. Inside the door Mrs. Sylvester turned with a confiding gesture.

"I will ask you," she said, "not to show surprise or resentment at anything you may see or hear; but to treat my husband as if he were an ordinary patient."

Halloran bowed; he was about to explain that he was not a practising physician, but thought better of it and remained silent. Mrs. Sylvester led him upstairs and into a large room, uncarpeted, but covered with a neutral-toned linoleum, upon which their footsteps were

unheard. The walls, painted a chilly grey, were naked of pictures and searched in every corner by the unhindered light from the two windows opening on the balcony. The air, in spite of the season, was cold though dry, and Halloran felt his nostrils tingling with a keen antiseptic odour. What little furniture the room contained was unupholstered and finished off with rounded edges ; there were no ornaments, and everything seemed arranged to deaden sound while permitting a maximum of light and air.

The brilliant bareness of the apartment was uncanny, and as remote from human associations as the temple of some cheerless faith ; this effect, indeed, was increased by the disposition of the heavy table and chairs conducting the attention to an altar-like structure at the farther end of the room. Upon this pedestal stood apparently a gramophone.

As they approached, Halloran observed several important modifications of the usual pattern. There was less visible metal, but the finely made cabinet work of the casing suggested an egg-shaped visceral cavity measuring about a foot the longest way. With his hasty examination it occurred to Halloran that as the ordinary gramophone put one in mind of a gigantic insect poised for flight, so this suggested a reptile newly fed.

Externally, in addition to the large trumpet-like mouthpiece, there was on either side a cup-shaped receiver fantastically suggestive of an ear. The whole apparatus was supported by a pedestal having a cupboard door on the right-hand side. At a little distance were two standard candelabra of wrought iron set as for an altar. As he stood before the machine Halloran's eyes were caught and held by the cold scrutiny of a pair of lenses.

The thing spoke.

"You are Dr. Fergus Halloran. I'm pleased to make your acquaintance. I am Raymond Sylvester."

Halloran kept his head. There was nothing impossible, he reflected, in the record having been prepared. The uncertain breathing of the woman at his elbow helped him to be calm.

"I assure you," continued the machine, "that nothing but absolute necessity drove me to consult you. Before going any further will you kindly examine my mechanism, and I shall endeavour to explain what I want you to do. But I see you are under the natural impression that I am a practical joke. The shortest way out of that is to ask me a question—anything you like."

The thing spoke in a thin, blaring voice without modulation. Looking upon the ap-

paratus, bathed in merciless light, Halloran was reminded of the stories of Memnonian sands, from which sounds are said to be evoked by the impact of the sun's rays. The absence of mystery in the surroundings of the room tried his nerves, so that he was almost unwilling to dispel the idea of artifice.

"Name the bones of the *carpus*," said Halloran at random. The thing repeated them correctly, adding :

"I think you will admit that the gramophone idea may be dismissed ; though perhaps you are considering the possibility of Sylvester being concealed in another room, and this only an ingenious extension of his organs. No doubt you will take my wife's word. Irene, will you give Dr. Halloran the benefit of your opinion ?"

"This," said Mrs. Sylvester, with an almost imperceptible shiver, "is Raymond Sylvester."

"It is a useful disguise," tittered the instrument, "but I do not wish to conceal myself from you ; as I said, I want your assistance. Irene will guide you in a preliminary examination before we discuss the question of treatment."

The egg-shaped central casket opened in two halves, the lower containing a covered glass vessel filled with a colourless solution in which trembled a human brain. A network of fine insulated wires connected the brain with

what might be termed the external organs of the instrument. The brain was moored to the bottom of the vessel by a thicker wire disappearing into the pedestal. Another wire of the same diameter ascended to a small circular zinc plate resting upon the upper posterior surface of the brain. Mrs. Sylvester opened the door in the pedestal, exposing a battery of two cells. When she removed the elliptical glass plate sealing the vessel, Halloran was aware of a faint odour of chlorine.

“ You observe that, essentially, I consist of a battery and a brain,” said Sylvester; “ the rest is mere mechanism.”

Halloran was so absorbed in his minute examination that the sudden voice caused him to start involuntarily.

“ I see,” said Sylvester drily, “ that in spite of your training you are not yet rid of the common illusion about the so-called mystery of life. If you will consider the human body with an open mind you will agree with me that it consists of a variety of inconvenient organs engaged ultimately in the translation of energy; and of a more subtle apparatus converting that energy into thought and volition. I won’t bore you now with a history of the experiments by which I arrived at the conclusion, obvious to any unprejudiced observer, that the clumsy

appliances of nature, subject as they are to disease and decay, wasting the greater part of their efforts on their own support, can be replaced by any simple contrivance for the direct production of energy. To go a step further—life is energy in flower. You are, of course, acquainted with the general principles of electricity?"

Halloran assented.

"Then I need only remind you that interruption of the electric current gives rise to phenomena varying with the nature of the substance interpolated. With a filament of platinum wire you get incandescence; with a mass of grey matter, cerebration. It is entirely a question of molecular structure; the resisting matter translates into its own language, so to speak, the invariable energy supplied by the battery."

"But—" began Halloran.

"I see you are full of objections; with your permission we will not consider them just now. It is sufficient that I am." It gave a short, cackling laugh. "Is it not miraculous that nobody stumbled on this before? The experiment—so admirably described by Poe—of electrifying a corpse has often been tried, and I am convinced that in most cases consciousness has been recalled; but owing to

the clumsy method of application, and to the fact that the motor centres respond more readily to external stimulation, the subject has only been able to find expression in convulsions terrifying to the investigator.

“But to return to myself. For some weeks I have been conscious of a gradual diminution of mental energy. At first this did not cause me any alarm, but a chance remark of Irene’s aroused a suspicion which resulted in the discovery that I am being slowly poisoned. The fluid in which you find me is a solution of certain chlorides, carbonates and phosphates, together with a sterilised organic substance. These are, of course, gradually decomposed by electrolysis, and the elements necessary to nutrition—the amount is much smaller than you would suppose, by the way—taken up by osmose; but, according to my equation, there should be no free chlorine. I calculated on recombination. On testing the fluid with an hydrometer Irene discovered that the specific gravity instead of being increased—as one might suppose by evaporation—is actually several degrees lower than when the solution was first made up. Will you therefore undertake a series of experiments to correct these errors? Incidentally, I may observe, my discovery throws considerable light on the

function of the chlorides in the blood of the living organism. There is also, by the way, a slight exudation of cholesterin in the sulci which must either be prevented or periodically removed."

Halloran was conscious that with his examination curiosity receded and gave place to a feeling of disgust. He recognised that the important question was the tie between the apparatus and the silent woman by his side. She was the more vital by contrast with this questionable survival; and its existence was a wrong against her humanity. Halloran found himself engaged in an abstract argument. The thing was absolutely in his power; supposing he destroyed it, would the act be murder? Raymond Sylvester was legally dead; there was von Reichardt's written word for that. But then his consciousness survived; therefore Raymond Sylvester physiologically lived.

"You hesitate, I see," said Sylvester, with a wheezy chuckle. "Let me tell you that I don't press you to undertake this—duty, shall I call it? There are many good reasons why you should decline to interfere. Had von Reichardt lived you would have been spared the privilege. I don't know whether you are above vanity, but I may observe that I chose you out of the whole profession. We read the

journals even in Vienna ; and we recognise the open mind."

Halloran remained silent.

"The man is insatiable !" cried Sylvester. "Finally, then, I directed Irene to take a house here on purpose that she might be near you."

"I will undertake the experiment," said Halloran shortly, coming out of his reverie. Sylvester laughed disagreeably.

"I congratulate you," he sneered, "upon your susceptible nature. For myself, I am incapable of any emotional disturbance. You have heard of pure reason ? That is the condition I have achieved. Formerly, as no doubt you have heard—with picturesque exaggeration—I was a man of strong passions. They don't trouble me now. Irene, will you give Halloran some tea ?"

Halloran found conversation difficult. The sense of being watched oppressed him, and he was abrupt and awkward. The thing simmered with humorous malice.

"You remember, Halloran, the gentleman in *Wilhelm Meister*, who carried his diminutive wife about in a box ? For me the case is reversed, with harder conditions, for am I not in the hands of the most vindictive of creatures —a woman ? How easy to neglect my battery ; how innocently a wire corrodes and breaks—

breaks of itself! And the happy widow bundles the remains out on the dust heap, a broken toy."

Whatever at this time was the emotional attitude of Irene Sylvester toward Fergus Halloran it is certain that she shared his embarrassment. Sylvester took no pains to conceal his entire apprehension of the situation. In a vague monologue he deplored his helplessness, praising the virtue of a woman bound for life by no possible tie but that of abstract duty to a mere thinking machine. Here was, he alleged, the supreme effort of platonism. He suggested her trials, her temptations; the possible birth of a new love, the intolerable yearning of a balked maternal instinct. In a word, he spared no thrust of calculated irony to torture his helpless victims.

"I am afraid, Halloran," he said, "you will not be flattered when I tell you the difficulty I found in persuading Irene to make your acquaintance. Really," he drawled, "I fail to understand her reluctance. You are—if you will pardon my frankness—by no means unattractive. But there's no understanding these women, is there? Perhaps, you know, it was only her artfulness; she wished to make sure of my being past help before she called you in. Her excuses afforded me infinite amusement. At last I flatly ordered her to bring

you here. One would have supposed—would they not?—that my need was ample excuse for ignoring these flimsy proprieties. Ah, well—no doubt she had her own very good reasons for delay."

This companionship of the pillory had the inevitable effect of deepening Halloran's feeling toward Irene. If he suffered, how much more did she, and was it not clearly his duty to stand by her? He had an example in her fearless quiet, her unflinching gravity; only a momentary come and go of colour, an uncontrollable quiver of nostril, betraying her tension. Besides, he argued, on purely scientific grounds his or some other man's assistance was indispensable; and, considering the situation, Halloran was a little inclined to congratulate everybody that the choice had not fallen upon a person of lower principles. That Sylvester expected his co-operation was evident.

"You shall be my consciousness-physician," he said. "The terms? Well, no doubt you will make your own terms with Irene. I shall not—indeed, I cannot—interfere should she err on the side of generosity. If you ever find me *de trop* you have only to turn off my switches—Irene will show you the details—and I am a mere cipher; blind, deaf, a lump of inarticulate grey matter. And now I think

we will excuse you. Irene, there are still a few points upon which Dr. Halloran requires illumination, notably the circumstances of my previous history ; and I trust you will not allow your absurd scruples to stand in the way of a plain statement of facts. I have warmed both hands, Halloran, both hands."

On leaving the house, Halloran was annoyed by the spectacle of Monroe walking placidly toward him. There was no mistaking that bulky figure. Monroe affected a Quaker-like honesty, a sheer black and white in his dress. His large, pale face was fringed with a silvery whisker ; a broad, black bow set off so much of shirt front as the stiff broadcloth of his waistcoat allowed. In spite of his own bigness, his clothes always looked a little too large for him, so that his manner of learned benevolence was marred by a memory of the butler. Yet only the quick eyes in a smiling, immovable face, the lifting of the figure on the toes at every footprint, warned a shrewd observer that Monroe's advertised honesty was a convenient formula. This evening he was apparently unaware of Halloran's approach until they actually met. He greeted him with a well-executed movement of suave surprise.

" Ah, my dear Halloran !" he cried effusively, "lightening, or should I say sweetening, the

arduous hours? That's right, that's right; don't shut yourself up too closely. I frequently deplore my neglect of recreative pastimes in my younger days."

Halloran had the uneasy feeling that Monroe had passed and repassed the house while he was inside. He had not forgotten Monroe's answer to Sylvester's last publication; and he suspected that there was some reason other than solicitude for the honour of science to account for Monroe's attitude toward the writer. Halloran himself did not share the general opinion of Monroe. He questioned his theories; and it occurred to him that Sylvester's ostensible death removed a menace to Monroe's position as a scientific authority. Was it possible that Monroe did not feel satisfied that Sylvester was dead? Some weeks elapsed before Halloran was able to place the results of his experiments before Sylvester. During the interval he again encountered Monroe, this time in the company of others. The great man was disposed to be learnedly facetious.

"We must amend the classical division of all men into the followers of Plato or of Aristotle," he said, "there are also the Sylvestrians—not to be disregarded, I assure you; eh, Halloran?"

But while his huge frame quivered all over with the jest his anxious eyes were searching the young man's face for some admission. His manner convinced Halloran that Monroe was watching him; and on his next visit to Sylvester he told him what had occurred.

"Yes," said Sylvester complacently, "Monroe knows his master. He picked my brains before, but hadn't wit enough to make use of them, consequently he denied their value; now he wants to pick them again, to better purpose. I'm afraid, Irene," he added, cackling horribly, "that Monroe will feel it his duty to damage your reputation."

The appeal in Irene's eyes put Halloran upon his honour. That he himself might suffer professionally from the association only increased his loyalty; and because he was so sure of himself and of her he came blindly through loyalty to love.

The sense of human wrong in Irene's position made his passion the more bitter; all reason but that of abstract, and, perhaps, fantastic virtue, was on the side of his heart. Halloran did not dally with temptation; indeed he refused to consider the obvious truth that Irene was legally a free woman. He was tortured, moreover, by the thought that in suppressing himself as a lover he condemned her to suffering as a

fellow-creature. Every day he learned of some fresh privation or indignity; the hideous selfishness of unhampered intellect was made clear in a dozen ways. Sylvester assumed the necessity for his wife's constant presence in the room except during the few hours he slept, when his sensory switches were turned off, and the current from the battery reduced to a minimum.

Though the weather was now bitterly cold he would not allow a fire in the room; and since an artificial light was, he alleged, a source of contamination to the air, Irene was compelled to shiver long hours in the dark. Sometimes it needed all Halloran's power of self-control to keep silent. He would find the patient woman pale and weary-eyed from hours of reading to her implacable master. For Sylvester had been cut off in the middle of his experiments, and, though he had completed the apparatus for sight, speech, and hearing, had not provided any means for turning over the leaves of a book. He was never tired of lamenting his untimely translation.

"Had I lived another year," he would say, "I should have produced an apparatus surpassing the human economy in all its functions. Just a group of sentient ganglia in a network of electric wires, transmuting the

familiar current into thought and volition. The details of the motor mechanism were so trivial that I neglected them, concentrating all my powers on the more exacting sensory appliances. I pay the penalty. Bereft of movement I am at the mercy of a pair of plotting creatures either of whom could annihilate me by the turn of a hand."

For with the apparent success of Halloran's treatment he threw aside even the semblance of courtesy; and the hour of the young man's visit was consumed between displays of naked egoism and trenchant insinuation. It is remarkable that Sylvester made little use of his unique experience; whatever abnormal impressions he received he made no sign. It would appear, indeed, that such was his invincible malice that he was determined no benefit from his discovery should react upon the humanity he hated even when he properly had ceased to belong to it.

One day when Irene and Halloran were enduring a tedious diatribe from Sylvester they heard a one-sided altercation on the stairs. Old Miriam appeared in the doorway making strangled noises; but, before Irene could speak, Monroe pushed into the room.

"Mrs. Sylvester," he began, in a loud voice, mopping his forehead, "you must pardon my

intrusion, but I could not make that old fool understand my message." He sank uninvited into a chair, and, lowering his voice to a convincing earnestness, continued: "I am in urgent need of assistance, and to the best of my belief there is only one man in Europe competent to help me. I take this opportunity to withdraw anything I have said publicly or privately in disparagement of—ah—Mr. Sylvester. He is a wonderful man; where is he, that I may make the acknowledgment I owe him?"

He paused for breath, fanning himself with his hat. Irene, white with anger, turned involuntarily to the machine. Monroe followed her glance with remarkable acuteness considering his excited condition. Halloran interposed.

"Dr. Monroe," he began, "I regret that it is quite impossible for you to see—"

"He *is* alive, then!" cried Monroe, with clumsy triumph, getting on his feet.

"I was about to observe that, for the moment, I have the honour to represent Raymond Sylvester," said Halloran coldly. Monroe grinned.

"I congratulate you, I'm sure," he said, with a meaning glance from Irene to Halloran, "or should I rather congratulate

Raymond Sylvester? It appears that he is unwilling to assist me. I may observe that an important life hangs in the balance, but I should be very sorry to intrude the claims of science, of humanity I might say, upon Mr. Sylvester's admirable domestic arrangements."

He backed with hideous politeness, though his eyes remained glued to the machine, and heavily descended the stairs.

"Halloran," observed Sylvester drily, "if Monroe comes here again I beg you will represent me by kicking him out of the house; I hate a clumsy liar."

Thus was added a new source of anxiety to both Irene and Halloran. Since there was no reason to suppose that Monroe would hold his tongue, Halloran suggested, as a bare act of justice to Irene, that a few persons of discretion should be admitted into the secret of Sylvester's existence. Sylvester would not hear of it.

"I fail to see," he said querulously, "why you two should not take an obvious advantage of the situation and marry. Nothing would be more to my benefit; for with your inevitable return to sanity I should again enjoy your undivided attention. At present, I am a mere pretext. There is a practical reason

that seems to have escaped you. I hesitate to say that I am immortal; but since the greater part of me can be renewed indefinitely, it is probable that I shall outlive you both by many years. If you marry, there are certain possibilities; don't you think that so important a trust should be kept in the family, as a sort of household god? You might even found an hereditary priesthood to minister to the thinking machine."

Halloran was heartily weary of the whole business. Had Sylvester shown any moral or mental worthiness his personal suffering would have been more bearable. In the abstract, as a scientific duty, his task deserved the renunciation of every human affection; but that a noble woman should be made to suffer private insult and public suspicion for a mere *Struldbrug* was revolting. He dared not ask even himself what were Irene's feelings toward him; he dreaded even her gratitude.

Indirectly he learned many lessons, and his faith in the sufficiency of material science was mercifully shaken. There is nothing more cruel, nothing more anti-social than pure reason; it is precisely by those indefinable instincts beyond logic that humanity holds together. So Halloran came to a dim

conception of that something, the little more, whether soul or spirit, or in homely language "heart," that no analysis can isolate nor synthesis involve; by which alone man holds his proper place in the universe. The phrase "for the blood is the life" appealed to him with a new meaning. He learned that the generous colour of life is due to other qualities than those of the brain, and that those impulses often condemned as a hindrance to reason are indeed the salvation of humanity.

In his life, Sylvester had been brutal, but not ungenerous; he was now the embodiment of littleness. He grudged his uncomplaining wife the necessities of existence, overlooking her frugal housekeeping with pitiless regularity. Worry and confinement began to take effect, and Irene was fast being reduced to the lowest condition of health.

Halloran fretted and cursed in impotent fury as he saw her growing daily thinner and paler. Irene would not—and he found a perverse comfort in the fact—dared not, allow him any privacy; and beyond a few hurried words at the door, spoken with averted faces, Sylvester had unhindered audience of all they said. The very ease with which they might have escaped their purgatory kept

them in constant sight of honour; and this was the more to their praise, since they received no credit for their steadfastness, but rather the reverse.

“Halloran,” Sylvester would observe, malignantly, “I don’t think much of your enterprise. Why, in my time, with half your encouragement——” and then he would chuckle horribly over a long list of criminal reminiscences, sparing neither names nor details, until the cheeks of his wife were scorched with shame.

Toward Sylvester, Halloran behaved with quiet self-control, meeting his insults with dignified reserve. Only once did he lose his temper in the presence of the instrument. To prevent unnecessary wear and tear of the brain substance he had improved the connection with the battery, so that the current could be regulated with a corresponding increase or diminution of cerebral activity. This, of course, made a slight complication in the duties of the person attending the machine. Instead of only one change between the full action of the brain and sleep there were now several degrees indicated by a needle and dial.

One evening, tired and dazed with her vigil, Irene switched off the sensory appliances as usual, but, instead of reducing the current to

the "by-pass" for the night, left the supply switch in an intermediate position. On making the external connections in the morning she was alarmed by a stuttering shout from the instrument, and immediately afterward dead silence with apparent cessation of life. She at once sent for Halloran, who fortunately had not yet started for his laboratory.

On examination and the discovery of Irene's oversight, Halloran concluded that Sylvester had suffered an epileptic seizure. During the night his brain had become highly electrolysed; there being no outlet for the excess of energy through his organs of communication with the outside world. When consciousness had been restored by interrupted currents of gradually increasing force, Sylvester, vaguely aware of an accident, demanded an explanation. Halloran told him what had happened, and he at once taxed Irene with an attempt to destroy him, and suggested Halloran's complicity. Halloran exclaimed with anger, and moved impulsively toward the instrument.

"A pair of ordinary gasfitter's pliers, my dear Halloran, ordinary pliers," tittered Sylvester. "Why this unnecessary waste of energy?"

Under the sway of Irene's eyes Halloran managed to control himself. He, however, assured Sylvester that if his accusations were

repeated he would give up the responsibility of attending to him.

The end came with surprising suddenness, and from an unexpected quarter. Glancing idly over the columns of an evening paper, Halloran's attention was arrested by a paragraph headed—

THE BURGLAR AND THE GRAMOPHONE

A NEW TERROR TO HOUSEBREAKERS

This morning between the hours of two and three a burglary was committed at a house in Hampstead. The police constable on duty in a road at the rear of the premises observed a man in the act of dropping over the garden wall. He sounded his whistle and immediately gave chase, but the burglar, whom he described as a stout, middle-aged man of gentlemanly appearance, managed to evade pursuit, and, at the time of going to press, has not been apprehended.

Among the articles in Mrs. Sylvester's drawing-room was a valuable gramophone. This, upon investigation, was found to have been entirely destroyed by the midnight visitor. It is surmised that, feeling his way about the room, the burglar by some means or other set the instrument in action and, in a paroxysm of fear, destroyed it.

Halloran went at once to Raleigh Place. Mrs. Sylvester met him with an embarrassment that caused him to hope wildly. Yet to the last the man of science asserted himself in anxiety for the fate of Raymond Sylvester.

"Not here," said Irene with a shiver, as Halloran was about to enter the gaunt room where the instrument had lived. She led him into a tiny sitting-room, comfortless, but apparently her own.

"Tell me what has happened," he said. "Can I do nothing—is there no possibility of repair?" She covered her face with her hands.

"Don't speak of it," she murmured, "it was horrible. If it would have been of any use, I would have sent for you at the time."

"Then I will leave you," he said hesitatingly.

She burst into tears. When it was possible for them to speak calmly Irene told him what she knew. Always a light sleeper, she had been awakened by a confused cry from the instrument, followed by the smashing of glass. She ran into the room just in time to hear a scuffling sound as some person dropped from the balcony and ran round the side of the house. Mrs. Sylvester got a light, and examined the instrument. The case had

been forced open, the glass receiver smashed, and the brain itself irreparably injured.

"I think," she said, in conclusion, "that the man intended merely to examine the machine, for I found that the battery cells had been carefully lifted out on the floor. Then, I suppose, he switched on the voice connection, and in his fright struck a violent blow at random."

"Then," said Halloran, "it could not have been an ordinary burglar." Irene hesitated.

"Will you promise to make no attempt to trace the man? The police are not likely to find him unless you or I give them a clue."

"Certainly I will promise what you wish; but I don't understand——"

"I think you will understand, perfectly." Irene opened a drawer in the table, and took out something.

"This," she said, "is what the man used to force open the case and smash the glass vessel. I picked it up from the floor just before the policeman came."

It was a small steel chisel such as is used in the post-mortem room. Engraved upon it was the name of its owner: "James Monroe."

XI

ON THE HORNS

I

SCOTLAND ROAD, Liverpool, is not ordinarily patronised by seafaring persons above the rank of donkeyman, but Alexander Pledge, second officer of the s.s. *Chrysolite*, found the Scotland Road convenient as a place of residence, for the very reason that one does not look for second officers in that neighbourhood.

When last night the *Chrysolite*, bellowing like the damned, nosed her way up the Mersey through a thick yellow fog, Alexander Pledge had been seized with a sudden and fervent wish that she would not make such an infernal noise. After seven years of absence he wished to visit his native land unostentatiously ; and the same dislike to publicity which made him shrink from the note of the syren led him to shun the placid heights of Everton, where so many of his kind luxuriate in carpet slippers during their time on shore.

His modesty was not due to anything that had happened on the voyage home; indeed, the skipper of the *Chrysolite*, who engaged Mr. Pledge in Melbourne to replace one Thomas Thomassen, frequently congratulated himself on the professional ability and sober, God-fearing character of his second officer.

Whether from economy or sheer want of assertiveness, Mr. Pledge had only engaged one room in Scotland Road. It is probable that few of his late shipmates would have immediately recognised the collarless man in worn serge who sat over the remains of his breakfast reading last night's paper. Nature had fashioned Alexander Pledge to suggest the bolder virtues; he was clear-eyed, square-jawed, firm-lipped, and broad-shouldered.

Only after prolonged observation did it become apparent that there was a want of harmony between the inner and the outer Alexander; his body bluffed on behalf of his soul, so to speak. This weakness, however, did not appear to be constitutional, but due to some special and probably recent circumstance, being only betrayed in a momentary flicker of the eyelids, a faltering of the lips, a nervous movement of the figure.

It is true that Mr. Pledge had drunk too much whisky overnight, not for the love of

it, but because he preferred to spend his first hour on shore morally blindfolded, and because the run from the vessel to his lodgings had all the terror of a timid bather's first plunge into cold water. There was but little practical danger; indeed, it is probable that, as in the case of the nervous bather, Mr. Pledge's greatest risk lay in the precautions he adopted. This is the penalty one pays for having an imagination. In consequence of last night's indulgence Alexander Pledge's nerves were jumpy, and, the clamour of middle-aged Irish-women invoking the Mother of Heaven to espouse their differences becoming insupportable, he rose and shut the window.

Finding the comparative quiet too trying a background for his thoughts, Mr. Pledge viciously flung up the window again and walked about the room. The noise irritated him, the silence made him afraid. By and by the regular movement transferred his thoughts from the past to the future and he grew calmer. Contemplation of the future was Mr. Pledge's strength and weakness; the same habit of anticipation which kept him from lapsing into a craven sot had caused him to make the fatal mistake of kicking down the ladder before he had done with it.

Footsteps on the stair caused Mr. Pledge

to sit down hurriedly and shield his face with the paper. He was too intelligent to hamper himself with the complications of personal disguise or an assumed name, but he was very careful.

Mrs. Hagan's face resembled the crumpled heart of a purple cabbage; you could only swear to her mouth when she had her pipe in it. Pledge disliked her because of her manner; which implied that her lodgers had "done something." Mrs. Hagan was bronchitic, and you had to give her time after climbing the stairs; but in less than three minutes Pledge understood her to mean that somebody wished to see him.

"Not at home," he said, with significant emphasis. Mrs. Hagan opened her little circular mouth to emit a soundless laugh, went about and with difficulty descended the stairs. For once Pledge appreciated her quickness of apprehension. He ticked off possible callers on his fingers. He had few friends in Liverpool and no debts, and he trusted that he had dodged his shipmates. He knew it could not be persons he had reason to fear, for Mrs. Hagan was loyal to the service rather than the individual, and if, as was most unlikely, the enemy had outwitted her, she would not have been allowed to announce their visit.

In ten minutes Mrs. Hagan appeared again. This time she took a chair.

"Better see what he's after wanting," she gasped. "Won't go away; sitting on stairs."

"Who is sitting on the stairs?" said Mr. Pledge in a careful monotone.

"China boy."

Alexander reflected, and came to the conclusion that he had no reason to be afraid of China boys.

"Very well," he said, "send him up."

There appeared in the doorway the eternal smile which persists from Hong-kong to East London and back again; the smile of Asia over the fantastic humours of Europe. Even to Alexander Pledge's eye, trained to Oriental subtleties of expression, there was nothing to distinguish this China boy from a hundred others. There he stood, smiling, with his hands hidden in his sleeves; and by his side was a large object tied up in a sad blue cloth of the same material as his garments.

"Well, John," said Pledge, "what do you want?"

"Mister Pledge—member Lobert, Lobert cookie."

"Don't know you," said Pledge, lighting a cigarette.

"Oh yes; vellee well member," said the

China boy patiently; "Mellican men, tar blucket."

Pledge remembered with relief the incident in the Melbourne store, when dislike for the persecutors, rather than sympathy for the victim, had caused him to interfere with the sport of drunken sailors.

"I remember, John," he said, nodding. "Well, what can I do for you?"

"Bling plesant," he said. He untied the knots in the blue wrapping, opened it out on the floor, and disclosed a fine grey parrot in its cage. Pledge laughed aloud.

"Savvy," he said, "no use to sailor-man; you sellee; make profit."

The China boy grinned and shook his head.

"Vellee good number, one pallot," he said patiently.

"Here's a dollar, and thankee kindly, John," said Pledge, rising and patting him on the shoulder, "but I don't want your parrot." The boy folded his hands in his sleeves, his head drooped a little more, but he did not move. Pledge made a gesture of hopelessness, returned to his chair, and took up the paper.

"All right," he said; "you're a good chap, Robert; off with you." The China boy silently withdrew.

II

Pledge was too well acquainted with the mysterious intelligence methods of the Celestial to worry his head over the fact that Melbourne Robert had traced his whereabouts, nor was he in any hurry to examine his prize. At length, with a yawn, he threw aside the paper, got up and approached the cage.

The bird, an ordinary grey parrot in excellent condition, measured Pledge with a cold regard out of one unwinking eye, craned its neck, and gazed at him from a fresh point of view. It nibbled a grain of maize quickly and delicately, showing its dry grey tongue, and submitted to having its poll scratched without giving any sign of pleasure. When Mrs. Hagan panted upstairs to remove the breakfast things and, as a matter of disinterested curiosity, ascertain Pledge's views about dinner, he said to her—

“Like a bird for your front parlour?” Mrs. Hagan shut one eye and peered at him with the other. Apparently satisfied that this was not a dodge to evade payment for board and lodging, she went and stood by the cage.

“I'm not caring,” she said; “messy, noisy brutes.”

“Amuse the baby,” said Pledge laconically,

filling his pipe. Mrs. Hagan honoured the jest by opening her circular mouth; then with great feeling—

“My baby went down with the *Corfe Castle*—God rest his soul.” She bent over the cage. Apparently her feminine perceptions were quicker than Pledge’s. She straightened and crossed herself.

“Do ye notice anything strange about that burrud?”

“Good parrot,” said Pledge, raising his eyebrows.

“I’d be asther wringing his neck,” said Mrs. Hagan solemnly. Pledge laughed.

“They’re always a bit uncanny looking,” Mrs. Hagan muttered and withdrew. The tongues and tempers of the yard had adjusted themselves to a working basis soothing in effect, and Pledge composed himself to begin a letter to his mother.

“Alec! Alec!! Alec!!!”

Pledge sprang to his feet, overturning the chair.

“Alec! Alec!! Alec!!!” The bird’s cry, quivering with unspeakable agony, rang through the room. Pledge caught up the blue cloth, and with outstretched arms fairly fell on the cage.

“My God!” he muttered. The room had

disappeared, and he saw the coral reef with the white line of surf and the man's face with the round, open mouth of terror.

When he had regained something of his self-control Pledge warily lifted a corner of the cloth.

"Good morning, Johnnie; have you used Pear's soap?" said the parrot in the fatuous tone of its kind. Pledge wiped his grey lips, and sat down to reason with himself. If he was going to lose self-command every time he heard his own name he'd better take the step he had so often contemplated and end everything. The affair was perfectly simple: the grateful Robert had taught the bird his benefactor's name—a name easy to the Celestial tongue. The repetition and accent were mere coincidence.

"Polly's a good girl, Polly's a good girl—give poor Polly a kiss," cooed the parrot. Pledge got up and apologetically stretched out his hand. The parrot stooped its head, and suddenly gurgled—

"One sixty-five, thirty-seven, fifteen."

Pledge snatched away his hand. "Chase me, girls," cried the parrot, retreating to the far end of its perch and eyeing him warily. Seeing that he appeared harmless the bird stepped gingerly on to its ring and swung furiously to and fro.

“Oh, it’s all rot!” said Pledge aloud, to reassure himself. But in spite of his efforts the numbers recurred to his mind with ominous meaning. It was in longitude $165^{\circ} 37' 15''$ that Alexander Pledge had kicked down the ladder before he had done with it.

It was necessary to face this memory of the past. They were out on the white beach of Espiritu Santo, under the broad, rustling palms. Kenyon had sworn that no other than themselves knew of the existence of the pearls.

“Enough to pay the National Debt,” he said hoarsely. “I’m telling you this because I like you, and because you’ve got the grit to carry the thing through. Brains? Oh yes, I’ve got the brains, but my nerves—well, Scotch Willie over at the liquor store knows what’s happened to my nerves. I can’t get the stuff without you, and you,” Kenyon showed his discoloured teeth in an ugly grin, “well, you can’t round on me, anyway, because you only know what I choose to tell you—savvy?” And so Kenyon had spoon-fed him; enough at a time to carry on their interminable plans and to keep his interest at fever pitch, but never enough to emancipate him from Kenyon’s clutches. For a time Pledge had been content to stand his chance of half-shares; but more than greed was the fear that Kenyon, having

confided in him, might confide in some one else. How swiftly he had passed from the conception of Kenyon as a possible inconvenience to that of Kenyon as an actual danger. Until that day on the little islet, whither they had rowed from the schooner for yams and fresh water. Elated by the maturing of their scheme Kenyon had talked a little too much, had told him obviously more than he intended, and Pledge rashly concluded that he knew everything. Then came the signal from the schooner for their return; the sudden temptation, the rush to the boat—and Kenyon's white face, mad with fear, but still incredulous of his comrade's treachery, lessening over the water as Pledge rowed alone to the schooner with a convincing tale of sharks.

III

Afterwards there was the stunning discovery that he had struck too soon; that Kenyon dying had taken with him the crucial information without which their laborious scheming and contriving was of no account. Pledge had gained nothing by his crime; on the contrary, he had destroyed his chances at one blow, and with the sense of failure, remorse like a bitter weed grew up within his soul, sapping his energy and distorting his imagination so that

every human face became that of an accuser. In time the man's unconquerable hopefulness asserted itself. The treasure was still there, and Pledge had no reason to suppose that any other person knew of its existence. It was true that he had thrown away invaluable guidance, but perseverance brings about most things. So Pledge pulled himself together and shipped on board the *Chrysolite*. In a few voyages he would save enough money to enable him to set about the patient reconstruction of Kenyon's knowledge.

"Alec, where are you going?" cried the parrot, in the voice of one strangling with fear.
"Come back, come back!"

"You devil!" cried Pledge, in a paroxysm of fear and rage. There was a short way out of that horror. He made a rush at the cage, tore open the door, and inserted his hand.

"Third cocoa palm from the boat landing, fourteen paces," chanted the bird.

Pledge's hair rose. Until now his fear had been of the natural, but this was over the edge. That there should have been a witness of his desertion of Kenyon was possible and sufficiently terrible, but who had taught the parrot Kenyon's passwords?

Pledge tried to think coherently. Kenyon must have escaped, and whether out of

revenge or in sheer drunken folly had trained the parrot to repeat the directions. Pledge knew that in spite of the immense distances a man knows more of his neighbour in the Southern Seas than in the next street of London or Liverpool. It would be comparatively easy for Kenyon to get into communication with the Melbourne China boy and commission him to deliver the parrot to the man he wished to persecute. Up to a certain point the thing was explicable; but beyond? Pledge shivered.

He would try to discover how much the parrot knew. He adopted conciliatory tactics.

“Polly, have some sugar,” he said coaxingly. “Polly’s a good girl.”

The bird agreed implicitly. Pledge held out the lump of sugar, and the parrot laboriously swung itself round the cage by its beak, wire by wire, and presently nibbled at the dainty.

“Fourteen paces, Polly, fourteen paces,” murmured Pledge insinuatingly.

“And they left that baby on the shore. It will never see its mother any more,” shrieked the bird at the top of its voice.

Pledge restrained himself. If it was only an ordinary parrot, it was a perfectly simple matter to wring its neck. But supposing the parrot knew the rest of the story and were

presently to let fall some golden sentence which would put him at once on the track of the pearls? And even as Pledge gazed into its cold unwinking eye the circle expanded and warmed with malignant fire, recalling the bloodshot orbs of Kenyon himself; the outline of the bird's head took on the shape of Kenyon's inflamed features. Pledge lost his nerve.

"Kenyon, old man," he whispered, "I'll not hurt you, I didn't mean to leave you in the lurch—it was only a bit of fun. I'll make it all right, Kenyon."

"Alec! Alec!! Alec!!!" cried the parrot. Pledge sat down and began to laugh hysterically.

XII

THE GREAT DANGER

WHEN the last of the other men had left my room, Newington let himself go in a shuddering breath of relief. All that evening he had kept himself so perfectly in hand that no one but myself was aware of his unusual excitement. The other men, Rowles, Paynter and Protheroe, were good fellows, but Percy Newington—was Percy Newington. He waited until the last echo of the closing door had rumbled up the stairs and died away in the empty attic, then got impulsively out of his chair and pretended to examine my water-colours. The house felt uncomfortably still after the spirited talk and laughter of a few minutes ago; but I would not speak, because I knew that any but the absolutely right word would as likely as not send Newington away without unburdening himself. I lit a cigarette, sat down by the fire and took up the evening paper. I had purposely turned my back on Newington, but in spite of my

honest attempt to read what was before my eyes I was acutely conscious that he was listening intently, that he wished to be unobserved, and that my ostentatious interest in the *Pall Mall Gazette* had not deceived him. My nerves are fairly healthy, but the situation was becoming intolerable when Newington exclaimed, "What was that?"

Taken off my guard, I turned sharply round. Newington stood in the middle of the room, his lean figure bent forward, his prominent eyes fixed on the door, his nervous hands crooked and half raised in the air. Even in that moment I noticed how perfectly his attitude suggested the hawklike stoop of his intellect. His eyes compelled mine to the door.

"Ah! — you heard it too; — there it is again!"

I listened. "It is only Mrs. Prosser going to bed—she is later than usual," I said, looking at him steadily and speaking with a deliberate drawl.

Newington dropped his hand and eyed me suspiciously; I could see that he was on the point of calling me a liar, and I smiled in anticipation, and to assure him that I was in a mood to suffer abuse without resentment. Perhaps I overdid my assumption of calmness, for Newington took it the wrong way.

"Oh, please don't treat me like a child, Marshall," he said impatiently, yet with a pathetic note of appeal.

"I don't," I retorted ; "children don't usually suffer from overwork."

Newington laughed harshly.

"Then you mean to suggest that I am a lunatic ?" he asked, bending his brilliant eyes on mine.

I hesitated for a moment : I did not wish to quarrel with him, but, in his own interests, I intended to be firm.

"No, not yet," I said ; "but you will be if you don't chuck work and go into the country."

To my surprise Newington heaved a deep sigh of relief. "Then you have felt it too ?" he asked eagerly ; "you know what is coming ?"

I shook my head. "There is nothing coming for me, because I have reached an age to prefer comfort before fame or riches, and have learned to take life easily."

Newington smiled incredulously. "Do you mean to tell me, Marshall, that you are like the rest ?" he said ; "that you have had no warning of the awful thing that is threatening us ?"

"Look here, Newington," I said, getting up and facing him, "suppose you leave off asking

conundrums and tell me in plain words what is the matter with you."

"With me!" he cried; "good God, if it were only myself I should not care. I can escape; I am leaving London to-morrow—if I live; but you, the others, the millions who are too careless or too dull to realise their peril. . . . Come out of it, Marshall! don't be a fool. What is the use of remaining? You can't help these poor blind creatures—they wouldn't listen. Do you think that I would be such a coward as to run away if I thought that there was the slightest chance of opening their eyes? They are already doomed; it is like the fascination of the serpent before he strikes. But you—come out of it, Marshall, before it is too late!" In his agitation he gripped me by the shoulder and shook me roughly.

"Upon my soul, Newington," I said irritably, "I don't know what you are driving at."

"Why, man, even the papers are full of it, for those who have eyes to read." He caught up the *Pall Mall Gazette*. "Look here," he pointed with a trembling finger: "'Unexplained fire in Bedford Square,' and here, 'Mysterious disappearance of a man in the City'; why, it's as plain as the writing on the wall, but they won't see it—they won't see

it!" He stamped his foot, and his voice rose to a sobbing scream.

"Well, for the matter of that," I said stolidly, "there are dangers in the country as well as in London."

"It isn't *in* London," he said ; then, stooping forward and speaking in a passionate whisper, so low that I saw rather than heard the words : "It's London, London itself—the streets, the houses, the great Beast we have created."

I began to feel seriously alarmed. "You'll forgive me, Newington," I said gravely ; "but this really proves what I say about your being overworked. You are not the first man—"

"Oh, I know all about that," he interrupted ; "it's referred to in the text-books, isn't it? as a form"—he laughed bitterly—"a form of insanity. That is the most awful thing of all: men's intellects are so poisoned by the influence that they dare not own the truth, but call it madness. . . . You remember the panic terror of the ancients—the sudden fear of something that came upon men in lonely places? That was dreadful; but Nature, if careless of her children, was not vicious. . . . When Adam and Eve heard the voice of God walking in the garden they were afraid, but there was something uplifting in their very fear; God is awful, but He is not malign. . . .

The voice that we hear to-day is that of a cruel monster, infected with our own lusts and vices. . . . Listen!"

He strode to the window and flung it up. The curtains bowed inward, the solemn sweetness of the night air filled the room. "What do you hear, Marshall?"

"A sound like the sea, a continuous murmur, now rising, now falling, broken occasionally by the sudden cry of a newsboy, the whistle of a passing train."

"Yes, yes," he interrupted; "but can't you hear the sinister undertone, the muttering that is neither human nor of the elements? If every cab and omnibus stopped running, if all the passing feet were stilled, if the voice of the river were hushed, you would still hear that murmur."

He shuddered, and shut down the window with a bang.

"Don't you realise that London is alive? That whilst we poor fools have been puzzling and quarrelling over the origin of life, the precise point where the inanimate compound becomes organic and sentient, we ourselves have been helping to create life on a stupendous scale—an organism more powerful than all our armies, more pitiless than the Minotaur? Do you believe that when a house collapses,

burying whole families in its fall, that when some hapless creature is mangled to death by the machinery he tends, it is an accident? . . . Let me make it plain to you, Marshall. It is accepted as a poetic platitude that London has a personality *apart* from her inhabitants: don't you see that when we speak about 'London's opinion' on this or that, we are on the edge of a bigger truth than we know?"

"I think I see how it is, Newington," I said: "your naturally sensitive mind, excited by overwork, has become possessed by the idea of incarnate evil in the shape of London. You are suffering from a sort of moral hyperæsthesia!"

"What is the use of telling me that?" he exclaimed. "You don't blame the individual cell for the general condition of an organ. You and I—all of us—are merely cells in the total organism of our race. Everything we will or do, think or feel, is but a summing up of the general tendencies of humanity modified by environment, and finally controlled by the ultimate purpose of the universe. Now we are unable to judge of that ultimate purpose, but we do know that the general tendencies of our nature are evil. Our folly lies in herding together until this aggregate wickedness is beyond our control; and in providing a body,

as the man swept and garnished his house in readiness for the habitation of that great Oversoul of Evil. . . . For ourselves Christ died, because, though fallen, we were made in God's own image; but these bricks and stones are untouched—are incapable of being touched by the general redemption of humanity. They are outside, monstrous; but none the less alive for all that."

"This is sheer fantasy, Newington," I murmured.

"Fantasy! Yet you accept the converse: you reverence a church—I don't mean the idea, but the very structure—because it is saturated with holiness, steeped in divinity. You admit the idea of sacrilege, don't you? . . . and what is the Beast of the Revelation but a city?—and why did God destroy the cities of the Plain—not the inhabitants only, but the *cities*, the streets and houses? Have you ever considered the true inwardness of those motiveless crimes against society, such as the blowing up of public buildings with dynamite? Do you suppose that these men, notoriously tender-hearted, professedly lovers of their kind, were actuated by the mere lust of destruction? No; their so-called crimes were the mad struggles of men who felt the toils closing round them—clumsy and useless efforts to wound the Monster in a

vital part. And that Law which condemns them is but a blind creature of the Beast. . . . We talk about building cities as if their creation were a conscious act of ourselves. If you come to think seriously of the matter, the building of a house is the spontaneous effort of an aggregate will to provide a habitation for the individual. A man does not construct a house in Hornsey of his own deliberate purpose, but because he is moved by the corporate impulse of that organism we call London. London wishes to grow; she imposes it upon her inhabitants that they shall make her grow. Properly speaking, cities build themselves, as we make room in our bodies for the cells of our development. It is preposterous to conceive an individual cell going about saying, 'I will choose this man's body or that.' . . . And when in the process of evolution a certain aggregation of cells is arrived at you get life, and in the course of time consciousness, self-knowledge; and the organism says, 'I am.' It cannot have escaped your notice that a modern city is so highly organised that we think and speak of its inhabitants as unity. It is a commonplace that a man living in one of our great cities is no longer a free agent: he thinks and moves only as permitted by the general consciousness of the community. The wave of

depression during the early days of the late war, the hysterical scenes following the relief of Mafeking and Ladysmith, the poignant gloom on the occasion of the King's illness, the solemn rejoicing over the Coronation—these things cannot be looked upon as the sum of individual emotions, but as floods of feeling shared willy-nilly by the man in the street. This you'll say is an accepted truism ; but what is not yet realised is the hideous fact that these emotional phenomena do not emanate from London's inhabitants, but from the town itself. . . . Consider London, with its gigantic respiratory and vascular apparatus of gas and water pipes, its alimentary canals in the shape of underground railways and tubes, and, more significant still, its stupendous nervous system of telegraph and telephone wires and cables. It is already alive, and the experiments of Marconi point clearly to the imminent birth of consciousness, of energy thrown off and detached, become aware of itself. This monster, to whom we have given veins, arteries, bowels, and nerves, is waking up. . . . It is a case of induction : just as the particles of wood in the body of a fiddle become educated into a harmonic relation, so that the instrument may justly be said to possess a soul, so the bricks and stones in our Metropolis have

become educated by the continuous vibrations of life and electricity to which they are increasingly subjected. . . . I need not remind you that it is a scientific commonplace that nervous and electrical energy are mutually convertible, as illustrated by the torpedo."

"But," I objected, "consciousness implies not only stimulus, but an organism capable of reaction. Now, bricks and stones——"

He waved me aside.

"Life and consciousness do not depend upon peculiarity of substance, but upon molecular arrangement, eminently upon condition. We are of the same ultimate substance with the inanimate objects around us; we possess no distinctive element by virtue of which we are living beings. The dictum of the chemist that carbon is the essential to organic matter is only begging the question. The difference between organic and inorganic is one of *state*, depending primarily upon the character of the intermolecular vibrations. Intermolecular vibration is universal; these walls are equally in movement with ourselves. It is merely a difference of rhythm, sympathetically alterable, as demonstrated by the experiment in which grains of sand are disposed in symmetrical figures by the communicated vibrations of a violin string. It is only a matter of scale, by the way, to con-

ceive our world and the innumerable planets as but molecules in some stupendous and single organism co-ordinated by that music of the spheres which the poets have sung. The disparity between interplanetary and intermolecular space depends only on our idea of space, which is as arbitrary as our conception of time."

Somewhat calmed by the abstract regions into which he had carried the discussion, Newington continued to walk up and down the room, his prominent eyes glaring into space, his nervous hands clasped behind his back.

"At least," I said, "you have given me something new to think about."

"New!" he exclaimed, wheeling round. "If it were new there would be a possibility that I am mistaken, that—as you more than half suspect—my mind is unbalanced. . . . On the contrary, from the earliest ages the mind of man has felt the truth of what I say. What are all the tales of haunted houses but half recognitions of this ghastly possibility? Nobody is afraid of a ghost, a feeble and preposterous figment of the imagination; what men fear is the house, the room so ineradicably stained with some crime that it has the power to work on our subconsciousness and create a spectre. This nameless fear is ever present

behind more natural causes for alarm. When the man in Poe's tale woke up to find that the room which previously had five windows had now only four, behind the practical fear of being crushed was the subconscious dread that the room was closing in *of itself*. That was the horror! . . . What is the secret of our repulsion from the Chinese but our irrational though unconquerable feeling that they are *automata*? Why do we shrink from the larger crustaceans? Because they suggest animated machinery. The fear of a thing implies the recognition of its possibility. In every age men have thrown out vague hints of what they dared not speak except in a parable: there was the story of Pygmalion, the terrible history of Frankenstein. We too have warmed our idol into life, feeding it with blood and sweat and energy, until it is no longer our slave but our master."

"There is just one point, Newington," I said: "if, as you say, this fear is universal, why does nobody but yourself make the effort to escape?"

"Because, like rabbits in the den of the python, they are paralysed by what they fear. The millions are no longer capable of exerting their will; they think and do only as London bids them. They cannot get away; London will not let them go. If it were only possible

to rouse them ! You know very well, Marshall, that if I went out into the street and cried on the people to save themselves I should be apprehended as a lunatic, because the authorities themselves are unconscious agents of the Monster and dare not let the truth be known. But you, Marshall, you are a man of intelligence. Listen to me : come away from this cursed place while there is yet time."

" My dear Newington," I said, " I neither accept nor deny the truth of your words. For yourself, for many reasons, I think that you are wise in your decision to leave town, but I have work which at present necessitates my staying here. In three weeks—"

" Wretched man !" he cried ; " in three weeks it may be too late. Who knows,— his voice sank and he glanced fearfully round the room,— " who knows but that in speaking to you I have already hastened the end ? There is a sinister truth in those words ' walls have ears.' Are your senses so gross that you have had no personal warning ? Do you never hear noises that you cannot explain ? do the shadows never move, nor the houses scowl at you as you pass ? Have you never experienced that sudden waking in a sweating terror, the awful consciousness of something in the room ? . . . Think of London at this moment. Listen !

Cannot you hear above the stertorous breathing of its human parasites the mighty systole and diastole of the city? Stone awakens and murmurs to stone; the Monster is plotting. Nor London only: when you consider the rapid development of other cities, the stealthy outgrowth of suburbs, you must realise that the country is covered with a chain of ganglia linked together in a vast conspiracy by a network of telegraph and telephone wires. To-night they conspire; to-morrow they may act."

So Newington took his terror out into the night, and I never saw him again. Whether he was the victim of delusion, or whether we have indeed all succumbed and become the slaves of a Monster more pitiless than the Minotaur, is a problem which for me remains insoluble.

XIII

ROAST APPLES

“ENGLISH apples, threepence per pound.” He read the ticket with sottish incredulity.

“Real English?” he stammered.

“From Hereford,” answered the little shop-woman, closing her mouth with a snap.

Hereford! He did not dissolve in maudlin tears on the word. The picture of his father’s rectory—himself disbreeched for apple theft—was clean, unsmeared by conventional remorse. Still it served; he saw the possibilities in the thing.

He would roast apples again—like a boy; there was copy in these emotional experiments. A paper for the “*Ptomaine*”? . . . Yes; particularly over his name. For the man had his vogue and never transgressed on paper, Nature having with humorous brutality made him an artist while she damned him. A sedulously acquired frankness conquered the deception of the neuropath, and he remained a

stumbling-block to the contemporary psychologist. His vices bred in and in; his work found a ready market for both its intrinsic merit and its pathological significance. Hence indulgence, and again another study better than the last. Inimitable, he already had his cult; and as he swayed on the pavement he grinned from ear to ear, picturing his baffled following. How the town would gape!—the great decadent in his salad days—recutting his milk teeth. The thing shaped itself; he pruned the quick phrases to an elaborate simplicity, when he was recalled by the level voice of the shopwoman.

“We close at ten—do you want anything?”

“Oh, pardon me, madam,” he cried with extravagant courtesy. “Yes—I’ll take a pound of those English apples—from Hereford.” Careless of the irony of his concluding words, the woman served him in a grim silence, counting out the change of a sovereign with resigned accuracy.

There were three apples to the pound, and he hurried to his lodgings with unusual directness. He encouraged the sullen fire with the tedious craft of the sometime destitute; stopping the tiny flash ever at the right moment. Looking about for what should serve as a baking-tin he discovered an old etching plate, relic of

a bygone excursion into another means of expression. For at one time he emulated Blake, but found that he—patient searcher for the inevitable word—jibbed under the discipline of line, and soon abandoned the practice.

He brushed the dust from the plate with his coat-sleeve, smiling as he examined the subject—"The Soul cleaning her Windows."

"A little malate of copper won't hurt me, I suppose," he muttered as he arranged his cooking on the fire.

He sat on a low stool before the hearth, his long hands clasping his slender legs, his stubbly chin rasping his knees with a crisp noise.

The apples began to hiss—then one grew to a face and laughed. He was not startled, for to him hallucination was as a familiar friend—rather a victim given over into his hands for spoiling. To be held ignominiously at arm's length like a pinned butterfly, observed with cold selection, and set down dispassionately upon paper. A man of infinite method in the purposed madness of his work, he counted that at the least three hours of consciousness remained to him. Then—the usual course; his landlady would send for Wilson, and Wilson would see him through. He recalled his habits of the past week and for the first time wondered.

"Never got them so easily before," he murmured, and became receptive as a sponge.

"Long time since you were down West," said the apple cheerfully.

The man nodded.

"Are you really from Hereford?" he asked.

"From Damson's Orchard," replied the apple with whimsical mimicry of the shop-woman's manner.

"Damson's Orchard!" said the man. "Why, surely, that was where——"

"Exactly—

Clear apple-leaves are soft upon that moon
Seen sidelong like a blossom in the tree,"

interrupted the apple with a leer.

"Don't," said the man huskily, "that hurts."

"What—after all these gin-soaked years? Ha! ha!—you, the toughest cynic of all—the inverted enthusiast—wince at a memory. 'Pon my soul I thought better of you."

"What became of her—did she die?" questioned the man sullenly.

"Hark to him! how he flatters himself," sneered the apple. "Bless you! she married a grocer and is to-day the fat and happy mother of her fourth."

"You are very bitter," said the man pointlessly after a pause.

"There is a great deal to be said for heredity," observed the apple sententiously, "and so you are going to eat me? Well, it's a kind of Sacrament when you come to think of it. Symbolical in a way—Serpent of Eternity, and all that. He! he! he!—fond of Symbols, aren't you?"

"I am immensely interested in Sacraments," sneered the man.

"You weren't always," said the apple, with a chuckle, "and for a trifling omission in that line—"

"Enough of that," said the man hastily; "it's late in the day to preach morality, and I can't say it becomes you."

"My lord is pleased to be satirical to-night. Heart alive! how you've changed. O! it was a romantic youth—roasting apples—in Damson's Orchard! You lit the fire—and burned your fingers. How she laughed at your male clumsiness! But you've learnt to light fires since, my boy, haven't you? She burned her fingers, too, badly. She stole the baking-tin from her mother's kitchen; there was a row about it afterwards; her mother was a large woman with a voice; do you remember? And the row was all about the baking-tin!—that's the best of it!"

The apple was so convulsed with laughter

that it nearly fell into the fire. The man rose quietly and set it straight. Then the apple continued — “I can’t congratulate you on your looks, you know—you are an ugly devil.”

“Same to you,” growled the man.

“Heredity again,” laughed the apple; “but you really owe it to the world to take more care of yourself.”

“I am not interested in my duties to the world,” sneered the man. “Tell me about yourself. How is it that you only of the three can talk to me?”

“Providence, my boy; one is just as many as you will bear. Besides, our mother is dumb. Think of a tree vocal in every leaf—every globed fruit splitting with the knowledge that I know. Root whispering to branch the deadly secret sucked from the bosom of the sinful old earth—you would have it all blazoned abroad, would you? But don’t you think you had better eat us?—we’re quite done—Chronos!”

“Why Chronos?” said the man.

But the apple was silent.

So the man ate the apples, scooping out the mellow pulp with the rare gusto of the boy that was. But for once he had lost the trick. The dead years refused to live—only the one day

that stung him. This particular emotional experiment was clearly a failure ; there was less copy in it than he had expected. He had the shamefaced conviction of a wasted effort, of having allowed a mere personal interest to obscure artistic observation. He had somewhere written "As much passion as you like in the getting, but above all things clean, swift birth. He betrays the amateur who remains tied to his intellectual offspring by the umbilical cord of a personal feeling."

For once he had failed to keep outside. "I suppose," he muttered, yawning, "there is nothing for it but to go to bed."

He awoke clear-headed at an early hour.

"Missed 'em, begad !" he cried, staring at the ceiling. "Now, this will interest Wilson. Impending attack of the Jims averted by diet of Roasted Apples."

He sprang from the bed with unwonted lightness. He felt strangely well, but behind it all was the conviction of a curious and involuntary change. The feeling grew with the day. He found himself diving into greengrocers, with a humorous bashfulness, and for drink craved nothing but cider. His acquaintances twitted him on turning vegetarian, but he said nothing. He accepted things as they were and, though morbidly

introspective, concerned himself only with the manner of his mental phenomena — was critical of form only ; attempted no explanation.

He had entered a phase of poignant whiteness in his soul's history, and was for the time lifted to the plane of the positive ascetic, a height inaccessible to the average clean-liver, who is capable only of a negative virtue. This was the other side of his temperament and its penalty. A passionate austerity succeeded indulgence, and the changed character of his work gave a fillip to the languid psychologist. He sang himself as a garden god — a human shape warped out of living wood, in whose veins ran blood and sap commingled. Possessed, he sat gaily cheek by jowl with his devil. Only by night he was harassed by the vague imminence of trees. Tender rootlets thrilled along his limbs and laid silken fingers upon all his pulses.

He consulted Wilson, who made him look up at the ceiling and bring his heels together. This he did cheerfully and without turning a hair.

With the oncoming of spring a riot, not of blood, swelled his veins. He felt within him the prick of shoots, and looked painfully at his finger-tips for efflorescence. His head was

filled to bursting with the twittering of prisoned birds.

So he endured the summer, but with the fall of the year an impulse other than the *carità del natio loco* spurred him westward. For one tree in Damson's Orchard called him with an imperative voice. He had planted the tree when a boy—he and another, and it must now be widespread. A journey into Hereford showed him the house untenanted, the orchard run waste. The ancient trees, hoary with lichen, laid their wicked heads together and whispered, their leaves fumbling at the wind like senile fingers. A jungle of weeds spread, quick as a scandal, about their crooked knees, and from the matted border a few pallid nasturtiums lifted jeering mouths at him as he passed. An inexplicable dread kept him from one tree standing aloof from the others. He took the house and engaged a crippled hag to care for him. Alone, he gave loose to his fancies ; he embraced the trees and called them his brothers ; he spread his arms wide and invited the birds to come and perch upon him ; he flung himself face downward upon the ground and communed with the roots of things.

The spell grew ; he was become the victim of the tree. In the night it loomed over him ;

its flexile branches writhed and caught at his throat as if to strangle him. A voice cried in his ear "Dig!" and he awoke.

He procured garden tools with the ostensible purpose of setting the place in order.

Digging about the roots of the tree he came upon the bones of a little child.

XIV

THE VALLEY OF ROCKS

TOWARDS evening he came to a sudden valley gashed in the bare-bosomed hills, where as in an alembic the vital humours of the land, the rains and the dews, drawn from the sky by tall white cliffs with violet shadows that looked like thunderclouds, were caught and distilled to be transmuted into quick fierce crops of grapes and corn. In many places the naked rock was clothed with gourd plants growing like cables and bearing great yellow flowers. Wherever there was a hollow in the gleaming limestone, or hold for a man's foot, mould of a noisome richness had been deposited. Here were terraced gardens overbrimming with hot flowers like some passion of the soil made visible; and secret caves full of twisted stalactites like strange dreaming, pillared and aisled and reverberating with the organ music of subterranean water. Every now and again a spring of very cold water gushed out suddenly

from the bare stone, to run a few yards and as suddenly disappear. Cottages half built, half excavated, as if they were but the sculptured portals to a labyrinth of hidden ways, clung to the cliff side, and the men and women that came out to stare at the stranger were heavy eyed and ivory pale, as if they belonged to a separate race bred in darkness and braving the light only to snatch a livelihood from the shallow soil. They kept no cattle, they said, but a few goats, and no children had been born in the valley for many years. Many of the women were goitred, and all spoke like persons that use words to hide their thoughts ; talking rapidly with their eyes fixed on the stranger's face, beseeching him to begone. They told him that the place was called the Valley of Rocks, and that here the corn was richer, the wine stronger, the honey sweeter, and all medicinal plants more active in their properties than anywhere else in that country. Dealers in drugs, they said, came here every autumn to collect roots and herbs. When he asked them where he should find lodging for the night they looked one at the other, and hastily directed him to the inn at the head of the valley. They told him to beware of the vipers, which here were very deadly : themselves were often bitten as they contrived the union of the gourd flowers in

which art they were very cunning, but they took no harm.

As he walked up the road, which wound like a snake beneath the crumpled cornice of the impending cliff, a curved billow of stone, he was possessed by the thought that the place held a meaning hinted at but not expressed in its passionate fecundity: that he was drawing nearer to a final statement, a summing up in human shape of strength and sweetness and soothing. At the head of the valley he came to the inn, a long, low-browed building with a line of windows under the eaves, standing in a clove-scented garden with its back to the cliff, and looking as if seaward but where no sea was. He passed through the open door, and as if guided by a dream, to a little room where from the wall there leaned the picture of a woman in whose eyes and on whose lips were concentrated the strength and sweetness and soothing of wine and honey and narcotic flowers.

Now suddenly he felt that his coming here had been predestined. The woman's face, fierce though tender-eyed, with bared throat and offered lips, hot though virgin, lawless as a flower, yet, like a flower, the concrete symbol of many secret laws working together, was the answer to riddles that had long vexed him.

Here was the unsatisfied desire of all the earth made evident in a single face. He knew that in all his wandering, apparently so purposeless, nothing had been left to chance. All his life he had been seeking her, and step by step he had been drawn hither.

The innkeeper and his wife came into the room while he stood before the picture. They glanced from him to each other with lowered lids and furtive smiles, so that the question which rose to his lips was never spoken. The man was pot-bellied and thin-shanked, the woman's face a white mask of decorum: they were old and feeble but had not the dignity of age. They asked his wants with a pandering obsequiousness, consulting together in whispers so that the preparation of his meal seemed like a conspiracy. They tended him with knowing deference, as if he were long expected, rubbing their hands gently together, and answering his questions eagerly as if they would prevent his asking the one question which his lips would not frame. They made no mention of the woman whose picture leaned from the wall, though all the house thrilled with her presence.

He ate and drank alone in the dusk, overlooked by the woman's face, her eyes fierce with desire, her lips smiling at him with a strange confidence. Afterwards the old couple

came into the room, and they sat talking of all that went on in the great world outside the valley. Every time he involuntarily glanced up at the picture they dropped their eyes upon their folded hands and smiled secretly, and when he strained his ears to catch what seemed like a footfall on the stairs and the rustle of a gown they glanced quickly one at the other behind his back.

Towards midnight the innkeeper lighted him to his chamber with many soft spoken wishes for his pleasant slumber. By the door of a room the old man paused as if listening intently, with eyes discreetly lowered and a little guarded cough. Then looked up as if in answer to a question which had not been asked, with "I beg your pardon, sir?" But immediately he passed on to the guest-chamber, threw open the door and showed a carved and canopied bed, and hangings shaken by the night air, with a muttered hope that the stranger had everything necessary for the night. Then he placed the candle on a table, bowed and withdrew, slamming a door at the far end of the passage as if to intimate that this part of the house was private to his guest.

He flung wide the lattice, and leaning on the sill gave himself up to musing upon the painted desire in the room downstairs. The wind

came up the valley in hot puffs, bearing the scent of many flowers and the murmur of hidden water. He remembered with a thrill that this was Midsummer Eve. He was always impressed by dates and seasons; not those arbitrary days named after events sacred or secular, but those profoundly related to the intertwined orbits of the planetary system. He believed that at the intersection of those larger forces human life was deeply stirred, as quivering overtones are struck out when one note of music jars upon another, and he could understand why ancient peoples leaped through fires at the standing still of the sun. Now was the time, and here was the place, and a dozen things, the half betrayed confidences of the valley, the veiled manner of the innkeeper and his wife, told him that the woman expected him.

That he had neither seen her nor heard her name only deepened his feeling that their meeting was ordained. A chance encounter, the making of them known one to the other with the necessary forms of speech would have blurred the mysterious directness of their coming together. He wondered how the inn people came by such a daughter, for so, without any definite reason, he supposed her. Then he remembered that, like exquisite wine

in unworthy vessels, rare types are often transmitted through common people, for generations degraded or lost altogether, reappearing now and again to uplift men in grey times or to hearten them in blazing times of war. He thought of her less as a woman than as the incarnation of the valley's secret which he was to discover from the touch of her lips. The innkeeper and his wife took on the character not of parents but of priest and priestess, guardians of a vessel holding rare essences of the soil; the inn became a temple. All that he had ever done seemed meaningless and trivial except in so far as it had been a preparation for this encounter. For this end only his life had been enriched with dreams and aspirations beyond the common.

For a time his mind was disturbed with thoughts of danger. What if the woman were a decoy for purposes of robbery, or even of murder? Again, his heightened imagination pursued wilder paths: he had read of dragons taking the shape of beautiful women, and of strangers incited to their embraces to rid a desperate people of a scourge. A moment later he laughed at his childishness.

He wondered when and how she would appear to him. Whether at dawn in the garden, or on the hot limestone ledges among

the yellow gourd flowers, or in the pillared alleys of the secret caves. He knew that if words were needed at their meeting words would be given.

The house was very still, and from the room next his own came delicate intimations of a woman's presence: sighs, a low murmuring, movings to and fro, and once a subdued noise of crying—or was it the wind whimpering under the eaves?

His will ceased to be his own, and he fell a prey to bold fancies born of the heat of his blood. Before his impassioned eyes the wall was gone and he saw her waiting for him now: a mystical, night-blooming flower unfolded on this night only of all time. Yet it was not she that waited, but all nature working to an aim through her: the crude aspiration of the earth rising up through corn and grape, distilled and rectified through human channels, informed with soul as blood is brightened by air, until its essence was offered in such a vessel as gods might drink at.

And then the other part of him, the creature of reason and everyday habit and convention, asserted itself. Like a grey rock thrusting in through the ribs of a dream galley, ideas of duty and honour pierced his mind. His imagination leaped ahead and he saw the

future in cold outlines. He remembered a dozen sordid stories: the phrase "a rustic entanglement" sounded in his ears. If he yielded to the promptings of the hour and the place what could be the outcome but shame for her; disillusion and boredom for himself?

But then, again, the sense of a larger duty owed not to convention but to the universe obtruded itself. He was less the pursuer than the pursued; no more wanton than the moth to the flower. Like two people seeking each other blindly through a wood, guided by a cry or a word, the starting of a bird, the quiver of grass where a snake rustled, he and she had been pushed forward through generation after generation of human life, with here a check, there an encouragement, until on this night of all nights they were watching the sky side by side, with but a thin wall between them. Of all creatures was not he who shirked the purpose of his being the most abject?

Out of the conflict of moods was born another, not of better or worse choice but of renunciation. Perhaps, after all, the aim of desire was not union, nor even the furtherance of life, but rather the release of the finer things of the soul, as latent fire is released at the approach of metal to metal. He had been ready and she had been ready, but while their

bodily eyes watched the sky, where one day trod upon the skirts of another on this night of all the year, somewhere on another plane their desires had met and mingled with the release of some new and better desire dowered with something of each, to return upon and enrich their lives as a raincloud, offspring of sun and earth, returns to bless and fertilise.

Early morning found him in the garden sobered and uplifted with a new purpose. To him came the innkeeper with downcast eyes and lips creased in a crafty smile, asking him how he had slept. His question was answered with another.

“ My daughter? No; we have no child. That picture? It was painted by a man who came to the valley for a day and stopped for a year. He never found her whom he sought, but lost his reason. In his madness he painted that picture and left it in my keeping to be a test of men.”

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